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ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

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BY

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PHILIPPA

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

'MUMMIE, why don't *you* dress like that?' said Philippa.

It had been the most wonderful luck to find, at the last moment, the two returned seats. Above, below, around them, like bees urgently pressing into a murmuring hive, the audience was filling the Queen's Hall: — 'Just the excitement, just the eagerness of a hive,' Beth Wyntringham said to herself, taking off her hat, passing her hand over her ruffled hair, feeling the elation in these approaches to a great concert that the bees perhaps felt as they pressed towards the magical honey-comb. It made her think, too, of going into the sea when she was a child, wading out through the breakers towards the great smooth waves that would lift one — like the first long chord — higher and higher, until, extended on a security of bliss, one belonged to the sea and sky. It was twenty years since she had listened

to the Schubert Trio with Aldous; twenty years since the afternoon when she had promised to marry him. And now she was to hear it with their child Philippa.

'Like what?' she asked. She felt the brush of a familiar discouragement, but hardly an arrest in her elation, as she leaned forward on the balcony to follow Philippa's eyes. Little Philippa could not guess at all the memories that made the moment grave as well as radiant, and of course her clothes never satisfied Philippa — though the trouble went deeper than clothes perhaps — 'Dress like what, Philippa?'

'Like the lady who's sitting with Father,' said Philippa. 'Haven't you seen them?'

Philippa must know quite well that she had not seen them. She must know that her answer would surprise. Her glance, cast sideways, gauged what its effect would be, and with the sense of her own slight shock, the sense of Philippa's deviousness, a strange word rose to Beth's mind and buzzed there, the word 'ambushed.' But if the child seemed unkind, and crafty in her unkindness, it was because she, too, was startled.

'No: I haven't seen him. How lovely that he's here, too,' she said, studying the crowds below. And

if only she had known about the concert in time Aldous, surely, would have come with them. She had even felt a pang of anxiety lest he should reproach her for having taken Philippa to hear that special B-flat Trio, and he not there. It was, perhaps, because of the Trio that Philippa existed. — And still she looked for him, trying to keep in touch with the elation.

'Where?' she said, for she could not find him.

'In front; — in the front row,' said Philippa coldly, as though she detected and repudiated evasion in her mother's attitude. 'They were in their places when we came in. No one else has hair the colour of Daddy's. It's the colour, almost, of a blue Persian! — Don't you see? — She has on a black-and-silver hat — frightfully smart, and a black fur — now she's throwing it back — and pearls. — And now she's looking at Daddy and he's not looking at her. — He's come to hear the concert, Mummie, like you! And she's come to be with him!' And Philippa gave a short, clear little laugh.

For some moments after that — yes, she had found them — Beth was silent, wondering less over the presence of her husband at the concert, with a friend unknown to her, than over her child. Philippa took her aback; as she had done ever since she was

born, almost. What did she see, or not see? And what did she mean, or not mean? She was only just fourteen, yet Beth often felt herself helpless and immature beside her, and stupid; yes; that, too, was a word that buzzed, with its reverberations of failure, inadequacy; — for if one's husband and one's child saw, together, things one did not see, did not that display one as stupid? — to them, as well as to oneself? — Beth raised the opera-glasses that Philippa, impatiently, pressed into her hand.

And now, suddenly, the two heads were there, quite close to her, as if held in her hand, isolated as if for her special delectation in the tiny circle; Aldous's dear, strange, familiar head — always strange, always bringing her that sense of surprise and enchantment — and the head of the unknown woman, with the black-and-silver hat, pressed low on one side, cut back from a curve of dark hair on the other and closely binding her brow. Her neck gleamed as white as a magnolia petal above the great fur. Her lips were red. — 'I don't know her. — She *is* charmingly dressed,' Beth murmured, keeping Philippa firmly in her thoughts while she drank down a long draught of realisation, its taste not to be savoured, perhaps, till long afterwards; she knew of it, now, only that it was at once sweet and bitter.

'*You* might be charmingly dressed, Mummie, if you spent more on yourself. After all — we aren't *poor*, are we?' said Philippa, taking her arm and leaning a little against her. She, too, had pulled off her hat, and her hair, black and straight and thick as a Japanese lady's, fell across her mother's shoulder. — 'Why did you get me this lovely coat and go on with that dowdy brown yourself? — I don't think she has any children. — She doesn't look like a mother, does she? — Her dress is as thin as though she were going to a dance — and of course she's *covered* with liquid powder.'

A soft wave of obliterating love was lapping through Beth as she felt the young form against her, relaxed from its hostile intentness. Philippa passionately possessed her father, but it was with her mother she took refuge. 'And when she hurts me,' thought Beth, 'it's because *she's* hurt and wants to hide it; — and afterwards she's sorry; as she is now. — She *has* a heart, even for me,' thought Beth, and the soft wave lapped warmly through her; and had not part of the radiance really been, strange as it was to know it so, that she would more securely possess it, and Aldous, if he were not with her? It was made up of so much that he did not share. More and more, as life went on, there were things they did not share,

not because they both felt them too much to speak of, but because they felt them too differently. But nothing marred their unity if he were not with her.

'What do *you* know about liquid powder?' she asked, looking round at her child, glad to win a spark of shared mirth as Philippa retorted: 'Everything there *is* to be known! — Not that I blame her! I'll put on layers, when I'm older, to hide my freckles. — She's probably deep yellow underneath!'

'I think your freckles are pretty, you know,' said Beth, surveying the charming little face.

Philippa always made her think of the princess in the fairy-tale whose mother pricked her finger; — her hair as black as ebony, her small, curled mouth as red as blood, her skin as white as snow — though swept by the drift of freckles.

'Well — if they're pretty, if they turn out an advantage,' Philippa smiled back, 'I won't paint them out. — That sort of hat is made on your head — in Paris, probably — as if it grew on you, and I do think it's horrid of Father to have brought her and not you!'

'Don't be absurd, darling, we only saw about it at the last moment; only by chance; — and so did he. — We mustn't talk, for here they come,' and Beth began to clap; and Aldous, far away, was clapping

eagerly; — he had so often, for all his aloofness, the eager air of a boy. And they were together, really, for he must be remembering that it was after the Trio, on the top of the enchanted omnibus swaying with them down Regent Street, that he had said, quite suddenly: 'Will you marry me?'

The lady of the black-and-silver sat and looked about her nonchalantly, only raising her hands, in vague concession, towards the end of the tumult. 'Who can she be? Has Aldous ever spoken of her? Mr. Chantry's daughter? — but she was a girl, and this isn't a girl; — though she is far younger than I am,' thought Beth, and suddenly, seeing Aldous lean his head to listen to her, her heart sank on a throb of jealousy, and, remembering past panics, she was ashamed and compelled her eyes to the musicians now taking their places on the platform.

So she had watched the other three, and from this place, nearly twenty years ago, while Aldous, his head held high, a narrow leaf of red laid upon his cheek, sat beside her with folded arms. She had been overwhelmingly aware of him, but aware, too, with the outer fringes of her consciousness, of her mother, poor, ambitious, disappointed, in the London lodgings to which they had come up for a modest sup of the season, her mother already impatient

of this friendship with the fortuneless young Civil Servant and already pressing the claims of kind Sir Anthony in Cornwall. Even now, in thinking of Sir Anthony, she seemed to smell the peaches on the warm south wall of the garden at Belfreys; — life with Sir Anthony would have been like that; a sweet thing; an easy thing; and even then she had known that life with Aldous Wyntringham would not be easy — strange, fractious, arctic, passionate young man. And as the Trio had summoned her forth, radiantly and solemnly — (as it now summoned, the bows had been drawn, Beth closed her eyes to listen) — she had known that it was in Aldous that the mystery of the future was embodied; Aldous to whom she was dedicated.

It had not been easy: no, but — she heard the music dismiss, for her, the irrelevant word — it had been beautiful, more, much more, than her girlish heart could have dreamed. Memories of young children, of Christopher, Philippa, Billy, were with her, she and Aldous looking at their children; memories of Aldous, sleeping with his tired head so safely on her shoulder: ('my comforter' he called her, and said that her hands were the gentlest in the world) — the memory of Christopher's dying face. And with the memory of Christopher stillness gathered

round her, a stillness into which, since his death, she had been shut; a stillness Aldous never entered: only now, in the music, all were held together and lifted up; — her lover of twenty years ago; her sleeping husband; her dead son; and — holy, was the word for that transmuting unity.

When the first movement was over, she kept her eyes closed. Philippa breathed there, softly, saying nothing. It was lovely to have her say nothing; and Aldous was there, far away, but listening, with her, and though the thought of something ambushed still buzzed dimly in her mind, something trivial yet ambushed, it was shut safely away by her eyelids. And again a bow was drawn and the heavenly balm of the second movement stole upon her. She remembered it perfectly, that opening phrase, though twenty years had passed since she had heard it; it was like soft hands pressed on tired eyelids; it was like a mother's smile, promising peace, sleep, forgetfulness; and: — 'heavenly; heavenly'; — the deep 'cello repeated again and yet again its beatific assurance. Now she was remembering Christopher as a baby. She was hushing him to sleep and he gazed up at her while she sang to him, a gaze that slowly altered, darkened, deepened, fixed itself strangely, until, with a sudden rending and revolt, the acqui-

escence broke within her and the eyes were Christopher's dying eyes. Had he been frightened? — keeping them on her like that until the end? She could not listen. It was intolerable, that acquiescent sweetness. Tears had filled her eyes and blindly she took up the glasses and turned them on the sombre little man bowed over his 'cello. — Where was Christopher? Where was he? she thought, repelling the reiterated beatitude.

Suddenly, in the circle of the glasses, a silver film moved across her field of vision. She was far away, struggling in the dark and loneliness, and there, held in her hand again, Aldous's friend had ever so gently stirred and turned her head. She was not listening either. She had turned her head to look at Aldous while he listened. Calmly, with her exotic nonchalance, but stealthily, the black-and-silver lady was looking at Aldous, as the moon, half-veiled by a waft of sable, may look into a midnight room casting a spell on an unconscious sleeper. It was a long look; a look brooding, controlled, that seized the opportunity of his unawareness.

A hot flush swept Beth's face. Until she felt it she believed herself indifferent to the small, one-sided drama. Why, indeed, thinking of Christopher, should she care who looked at Aldous? And now,

with the hot flush, came a feeling of guilt, as though she had been caught eavesdropping. She laid down the glasses.

'Mummie,' said Philippa, 'were you pretty when you were young?'

The Schubert was over. The last movement, mirthful, wild, melancholy, with its sense of sweet things ended, had faded, as if with pipe and tabor and the dancing feet of a marriage festival, winding processionally round a distant mountain pass against an evening sky. Beth gathered in her thoughts, pressing intimations of peril out of sight, averting her eyes from the heads of Aldous and his friend, turning to Philippa's question.

'Pretty?' she said, and, as the meaning of the question came to her, it was as if a fly had settled on her cheek; fear again, but in such trivial form that it was shameful to entertain it; all this sickness of panic was shameful: there was no ambushed panther; only a foolish fly of hurt vanity to brush away; — for she had never, really, thought of herself as not pretty.

'I think I was; rather,' she said. 'Some people thought me so, at all events.'

'Daddy did, I suppose.'

'Daddy did. — Wasn't that Trio lovely, Philippa? Didn't you care for it?'

'Yes. It was lovely — but too long. I don't like things to go on so long; they make me feel just the opposite. — That last movement was rather like Daddy, wasn't it, and that middle part like you: — you are rather *too* much of a good thing sometimes, you know!' said Philippa, wrinkling up her nose at her.

'Isn't Daddy, too, then?'

'Ah — but that end isn't a bit *good!* — It's getting *away* from goodness!' smiled Philippa. 'It's wild and gay — and pretending not to care even when it's *very* unhappy underneath. — Daddy said once, at a picture gallery he took me to, that you were like a Reynolds' *grisaille*, when you were young; silver-gold and silver-brown and rose-colour. You haven't any rose-colour now,' said Philippa, surveying her, 'but I rather like you pale-brown all over, and your big eyes; — only you *have* lost your figure, and I don't believe you need have if you'd worn the right belts. Not that you're fat. You're thin, really; too thin: but *broad:* in the wrong places.'

'A short-legged, broad-hipped, waddling matron!' Beth exclaimed, masking her discomfiture in extravagance and eliciting a laugh from Philippa.

'You don't *waddle* a bit,' she assured her, pressing her mother's arm, 'though you do bundle along sometimes: — as if you'd suddenly remembered that you'd forgotten something or were afraid of being late for a committee. You're always rather anxious, Mummie, as if you expected to be found fault with — and that's *such* a mistake in life!' Philippa wrinkled her nose again, like a playful pup making a snatch at a friendly antagonist. 'You should always try to feel that it's the *other* person who is wrong!'

Beth surveyed her child. 'But suppose they're not?'

'But suppose *you're* not!' Philippa retorted. 'That's the thing to suppose. — And you're really quite young in the middle of your face, Mummie; it's only round the edges that things fray away, don't they? I'm going to have my face lifted if ever I get old!' Philippa declared, taking up the opera-glasses, and revealing her train of thought as she added: '*She* doesn't need face-lifting yet, but she's the kind that will do it and she goes in for being willowy and mournful. — Oh, Mummie — she's looking round! — Do you see? Now we can make up our minds about her. She has actressy eyebrows and her mouth and eyes are much too big for her

face. — Sick and silly, that's what she looks, and she thinks it makes her interesting to be mournful,' said Philippa, while the lightness of her voice did not conceal a strangely mature irony. 'And, oh — Mummie! — she's looking straight at me! — I wonder if she can really see me? I wonder if she's thinking: Who is the black-haired child in *bleu horizon* who's sitting so still and staring so hard? — I'm sure she sees me! I'm sure she'll not forget me!'

'Don't stare at her. — Please. — I wish you wouldn't, Phil,' Beth murmured, while her startled mind seemed to pick its way in a bog of implication, seeking foothold. — Edges? — Were her edges really so frayed? — 'It's so rude to stare.'

'But everyone stares behind their glasses. Glasses make it polite. Really and truly, Mummie, I don't think she knows I'm looking at her. — And now she's turned round and is murmuring to Daddy again. — Oh, Mummie, do you think it's so awfully interesting, this concert? I'd rather be at the pictures! — Yes, I'm a low-brow and you'll never make me high! — Here they come again and I'm *sick* of them! All so solemn and so pleased with themselves and just sucking in the applause. — What fun it would be if no one clapped at all! — just to see how they'd take it! — Don't you think

musicians look awfully silly — squatting about on their little stiff chairs with 'cellos between their legs and violins under their chins and coat-tails swinging down behind — do look at his! — when they're at the piano. And they're perfectly *absurd*,' Philippa declared, flapping her programme while her eyes rested on her father and the murmuring lady, 'when they blow their noses!'

CHAPTER II

PHILIPPA was very quiet during tea in the Piccadilly tea-shop.

Aldous and his friend had left the hall after the second Trio, a Beethoven Trio, and Beth knew that the child had watched their departure with an intentness as full of surmise as her own. She had not been inapt in her description of the unknown lady. Seen from above, her small, foreshortened face had a pinched and sickly look, but her slender, fluent form and glances, as she went, of desultory waywardness, exhaled the unmistakable aroma of conscious and panoplied allurement. That Aldous felt it Beth could see. He bent his tall grey head to her as, with plaintive eyebrows, she cast a backward phrase at him, and, as they passed beneath the balcony, he slightly placed a hand under her elbow, partly to keep her near, partly to guide her, as though she were of precious, fragile material, past a group that impeded their departure. So easy was her acceptance, so secure of his solicitude, that they seemed indeed friends of long standing.

Philippa made no comment on the spectacle and

only remarked, as she drank her tea and ate her crumpet, that she hated Beethoven. 'He's always complaining and grumbling, Mummie,' she said, and as Beth vaguely protested — 'Or else pretending to be so awfully cheerful that he deceives nobody. — Oh — I know he was deaf and very unfortunate and that nobody would marry him; — but lots of people are just as badly off and say nothing about their feelings. Nice people don't say anything about their feelings; they hide them,' Philippa asserted, with a dark glance.

'Then no artists are nice people.' Beth felt too bruised and wearied to debate the theme with requisite lightness, and Philippa answered, sombrely:

'Of course they're not. — They can't keep themselves *to* themselves — as Nanny always said one should!'

Was she horribly clever, this young child of hers, Beth wondered, glancing at her over the cakes? Was she not cleverer than any black-and-silver lady of conscious allurement could ever hope to be? And did anything really allure Aldous so much as cleverness? That was why he adored Philippa. — More than anything. And this fact, so securely established, might surely dispel the darkness that lay upon her spirit. But, after they had boarded their

'bus and were rolling down Piccadilly, she felt it hanging above her, a half-lifted fog, ready to descend and blot out the familiar landscape. Piccadilly on a clear chill April evening, the sun setting red over Knightsbridge and the trees in the Green Park all pricking into bud, was associated in her mind with the excitement with which she had first seen it at just such a season, when, a bookish country girl suddenly transported to the London of Thackeray and Trollope and Henry James, she had floated in a hansom down its tide. But all these memories lay under a livid sky to-day, and, shut into the present, her mind picked dully at the passionate question: 'Why has he never told me about her?'

'I suppose we are very unfashionable people, Mummie, aren't we?' Philippa enquired when, Kensington reached, they had alighted and were walking down Gloucester Road. 'I suppose no really fashionable people live in a small street in Kensington.'

'We are very *nice* people,' said Beth sadly. She so loved the little street in Kensington. She had always felt it a fairy-tale street, ever since the spring evening, later in the year than this, when she had stood, her arm in Aldous's, and seen the tulips arising

from the little flagged gardens and the blossoming hawthorns and double cherry-trees leaning over the gates, and said, 'We *must* live here.' It was one of the belated, still unmenaced, back-water streets of London that hold a fragment of the country in their quiet hands, the little square plots in front fit for all sorts of gay devices, and oblong gardens behind where, around the grass-plot and against the walls, one could grow lupins and irises and Michaelmas daisies and watch the leaves break from the blackened branches of an ancient elm. She had written a shy little poem about country in London that evening and tucked it into her next-morning letter to Aldous. Her tiny volume of verses, published through her father's fond insistence, had been the link that had brought her and Aldous together. He had said when they met, after they knew each other well enough for him to say such things, that if a willow-warbler could write, it would have written just such poetry; 'Oh — but a willow-warbler is far too heavenly!' Beth had protested, for she had no illusion about her verses, and Aldous, fondly, had replied: 'It's rather a silly darling, too, you know.' She had been a little startled, more on the willow-warbler's account than on her own; and reflecting on the word, had felt that if Aldous found the wil-

low-warbler silly, it must be because it went on and on — 'And I'll be careful not to do *that*!' she had thought. But had she been careful enough? Beth, searching her memories as she and Philippa approached their home, wondered if her happiness had worn too monotonous a manner. She had always tried to keep unhappiness out of sight, to weave it away from the foreground, where Aldous and the children lived, into the background where she brooded over them, and perhaps that had been a mistake. Only, Aldous shrank from unhappiness. It embarrassed him. He went away, quietly and unobtrusively, if he felt one unhappy, and perhaps, thought Beth, as they turned into the gate, he had felt her unhappy ever since Christopher's death. But surely her sorrow had been safely hidden.

'Just when does niceness begin to get fashionable?' Philippa said, 'and just when does it stop? — I mean, we are just as nice as possible, yet, however much we tried, we'd never be fashionable. — Why is it?'

Beth had paused to look at the daffodils that rose like the flames of a soft underground fire from between the flags. 'Well, if one *tried*, I suppose one would stop being nice,' she suggested. — 'I don't mean that it's not nice to be fashionable; — it must

be very nice; if it came without trying. — Perhaps you'll be fashionable, Philippa; and Grannie ought to have been, oughtn't she?' — Beth got out her latchkey and opened the door.

On the hall table beside the bowl of wallflowers lay a telegram. Chuffie, the family cat, a stalwart tortoiseshell, just the colour, as Philippa had said, of a piece of rich wedding-cake, came slowly forward to greet them, tilting, as he came, against the dining-room door. He wore a red collar and bell and had, the children asserted, the largest green eyes of any cat in Kensington. He had been Christopher's special cat, and even now, with the wire waiting, Beth stooped to pat him before she took it up.

'It's from Daddy,' said Philippa, coming to stand by her shoulder.

'I don't think so — I knew he was going to the country,' Beth murmured. She could not tell Philippa not to read with her, yet she wished she were not there, why, she did not know. But in another moment she did know; for the telegram was from Aldous and ran:

'Have Philippa meet me Victoria Booking Office 4.15 Mrs. Brandon invites her for week-end ride on downs tomorrow love Aldous.'

Mrs. Brandon. Her name was Mrs. Brandon.

She was Mr. Chantry's daughter and not a girl. — But Philippa had torn the paper from her hand.

'Mummie! 4.15! I'm too late! Riding on the Downs! — And I'm too late! Oh — *why* did we go to the hateful concert!'

Beth looked at her almost unseeingly. This Mrs. Brandon already understood so accurately the road to Aldous's heart that she had asked Philippa for the week-end. — But what harm? — What harm? — She rallied herself from the shock she had not fully fathomed; she tried to be stern with herself; Aldous had not known that morning that Mrs. Brandon was to be there. If he had known he would have told her; — but she remembered then that he had not told her of this friendship, and remembered that he had never said that the name of Mr. Chantry's daughter was Mrs. Brandon.

'Come upstairs, Philippa. It's too bad, but you can't go now,' she said.

But Philippa did not move. She stood by the table and stared down at the paper in her hand; a white, fierce look.

'Mummie, you're half an hour late,' said Billy, appearing on the landing, a book under his arm. He wore his blue wool jumper and brown tweed knick-

ers and over the spectacles that enlarged his eyes his brows had their timid, worried look. Already he knew that something was wrong with her and Philippa.

'I know. — I'm coming, darling. — It's too bad, Philippa; but it can't be helped now.'

As she began to mount the stairs, Philippa looked up at her vindictively. 'It *can* be helped! I'll catch a later train! Where's the A.B.C.! — Oh, you *know* there's nothing in the world I'd love so much as riding on the Downs with Daddy!' She snatched the yellow book from the stand on the hall table. 'What's the station? Where has he gone to?' she cried, turning the pages, and Beth, arrested, standing with her hand on the baluster, looking down at her child, tried to remember the name, though her mind seemed cleft in two. — Would she have wanted Philippa to go? By what right could she have refused Aldous's invitation for her?

'It's too late — far too late,' she said. 'And you couldn't travel alone.'

'Travel alone! Of course I can! I'll wire Daddy to meet me! — What's the station — oh — *don't* stand there arguing, Mother!'

'Put down the book. You're not going. Put down the book, Philippa.' The child's imperative

tone had roused Beth's resolution. 'It's too late to wire. And I don't remember the station.'

'Don't remember it?' Philippa stared up at her haughtily. 'Didn't Daddy tell you where he was going this morning?'

'He said to Mr. Chantry's.'

'It's in Sussex. He's stayed there before. You've written to him there.'

'Yes. He's stayed there. He has written to me from there; but I forget the address.' Beth heard the dogged note of her dull, flat voice. 'And you must come upstairs now.'

Quietly, accurately, Philippa pushed the A.B.C. back into its place and followed her mother to the landing. When she stood there beside her and Billy — for, helplessly, Beth remained waiting for her — she said, looking straight into her mother's eyes: 'I don't believe you've forgotten it.'

Beside them, Billy looked down at the floor, his brows drawn to a knot of pain.

'I don't believe you've forgotten it,' Philippa repeated, her eyes, in the dim light, darkened and balefully shining. 'He wants me. He's told her that he wants me. And you are determined that I shan't go. That's all.'

And it was true, was it not? — All except her

having pretended to forget. Beth's mind was cleft in two and across the chasm she knew that the name of the station awaited her. She could see its shape at the top of a sheet of grey note-paper; a waft of harvesting came with it. — Wheat? — No, not wheat; not stubble-fields; not Keats's 'Ode to Autumn'; — but the shape and savour of the name was there and under it, 'Darling' in Aldous's handwriting.

'Will you please go on, Philippa?' she said. She often saw herself as weak and cowardly when opposition to those she loved was forced upon her, but in an extremity of dismay, such as this, a sudden strength, distilled from some unknown depth of her nature, sometimes visited her. It visited her now, withholding her from expostulation or excuse, and hearing it, Philippa turned away and went slowly up the stairs.

Beth and Billy watched her go.

'Are you too tired to read, Mummie?' Billy, now that Philippa had disappeared, spoke at last, looking up at his mother.

'No, dear; of course not.'

'Wouldn't you rather lie down and rest?' said Billy, with no special air of concern but with his gentle eyes upon her.

'No; it would be a rest to read.' Beth passed before him into the drawing-room.

The first thing she always felt about her drawing-room was that one saw the hawthorn tree in front and the elm behind. It was always her bit of country she felt first; just as in her heart it was the country of her girlhood that was the background to all her London life. But she was very fond of her drawing-room, though it worried her sometimes with the feeling that it was not really adequate to Aldous's life, while so adequate to hers. Books; too many shelves for a drawing-room, of course, but Aldous's little study behind the dining-room was already full; — and her bureau with its flowers and photographs and committee papers, and her knitting-bag by the fire with magazines to hand; these were her essentials; and though the pretty chintz was faded, the brightness of the daffodils standing everywhere in bowls and glasses made up for it. But Aldous, averse as he was to all parade, would have liked, she felt sure, a more stately, a serener setting for his bridge-parties. Aldous also, she sometimes feared, was annoyed by the large portrait of the three children that hung at one end. It had little æsthetic merit; she knew that; it was too big for the room: but it was not bad, not pretentious

or garish or sentimental: just a pleasant, sober record of a moment in the three lives, so dear to her that she could not steel herself to its removal.

Over the mantelpiece the Chinese painting of a pale alabaster jar, a black lacquer box and a spray of pomegranate, flower and fruit, charmed but oddly seemed to hold her at arm's length, just as her mother did, from whom it was a wedding present; her mother from whom Philippa had inherited the black hair growing in a peak on her forehead, and the ruthlessness; and, as she sat down on the sofa beside Billy, she remembered, with an added sinking of the heart, that she had that morning, when Aldous told her he was going to Sussex for the week-end, telephoned to her mother and asked her to dine with her. She wished she had not done so now.

She turned the pages of 'Ivanhoe' and found the place. Billy sat gently leaning against her. He was docile and not expressive of criticism. Christopher had illuminated any reading with his glancing gaiety; Philippa usually riddled it with mockery; but Billy would meditate on Scott and make up his mind about him at leisure, and sat now, acquiescent if not absorbed, his hand playing absently with the fringes of her scarf; and his presence was dear to her, appeasing, even sustaining, though Billy was only

nine years old. Aldous found him dull, she knew; but he was not dull. His quiet was often self-protective. He shrank from his father's lambent thrusts and from Philippa's flouts and sallies. He drooped, too, before her own attempts to place him in a favourable light with Aldous, draw him out, seize his opportunity for him when he had let it pass. She felt that she was often clumsy in her eagerness and schooled herself to accept for him, in silence, the background place. But she nursed the dream of future achievement for him. He had, she believed, inherited from her own father the scholar's mind with the pensive brows and widely-set, near-sighted eyes, and when she saw Billy troubled or disconcerted or shy, it gave her a pang of retrospective insight, understanding afresh her father from her son. Now, in the peace his presence brought her, she characteristically forgot the passage of time and looked up, incredulous, when the sound of a taxi drawing up below announced her mother's arrival.

CHAPTER III

OH, DEAR! There's Grannie! And I'm not dressed! — Darling, stay here and talk to her — she's really a quarter of an hour early — and tell her I'll be down in five minutes!'

Beth fled upstairs and dressed hastily, scanning her features in the mirror for an anxious moment before presenting them to her mother's beautiful and caustic eye. 'It makes the edges fray more than ever, this black evening dress,' she thought, passing the powder-puff rapidly round her cheeks and chin, 'and I know that it vexes Mother to see me getting old. — Failure vexes her. — Poor Father ——' and she caught a scarf from a drawer and turned it round her neck as she left the room. This had always been her attitude to her mother: propitiation, and sometimes evasion; 'like Father's,' she thought as she sped downstairs; 'only he was never really frightened; and I am.' There seemed always, however halcyon the horizon, something that had best be hidden from her mother; something she so often failed to hide. Would she guess, at once, to-night, that she was unhappy?

Billy was obediently talking to his grandmother, who stood with her back to the fire, her hands behind her, looking down at him. 'I'm afraid I'm not very good at games,' he was saying in his patient, explanatory way; and already Beth felt something hot and protective mount in her, as she saw the slightly smiling scrutiny that her mother bent upon her son. It was light, detached, and the scrutiny that had been bent upon her father had been, so often, wrathful and incredulous; but her mother saw Billy as she had seen her husband, branded with the brand of the unsuccessful.

She was a beautiful woman, even at seventy, and she stood now, erect and stately, in a commanding attitude, one foot in its slender black satin shoe poised behind her on the fender. She always wore in the evening a wisp of black lace on her hair — full grey hair, flowing upward from her brows. Gossamer chains of diamonds shook in her ears and a black transparent scarf, embroidered at the ends in sombre purples and reds and golds, fell about her knees. Yes, thought Beth, meeting the glance of the dark eyes, if she had anything to hide, her mother would certainly find it out.

'Well, my dear, what have you been doing with yourself to be so bustled?' she enquired, holding

her cheek for a kiss, while Philippa, in her evening white, slipped into the room — for when her parents were alone Philippa now dined with them. Her appearance did not give Beth more composure.

'I've been dressing rather carefully,' she smiled, wishing that her eyes did not feel so strained and tired.

'With your hair pinned on one side like that? — tuck in the braid on the left, Philippa,' smiled Mrs. Oliffe, not unkindly, for when she had dealt a thrust she became more gentle. But she was always hovering on the edge of a dark temper — never a bad one; to suspect that would have been to belittle her; — always brooding on wrongs past or present; of which now the most tangible and apparent was that she, who had the mien and mastery of an ambassadress, should be ending her days in a flat on Campden Hill. Of course Father had never satisfied her. Of course she had never belonged in the country rectory. She had been disappointed about everything, all her life, thought Beth, again remembering Sir Anthony, and noting that the rug before the fire was tattered at the edges and that Barton the house-parlour-maid had, as so often, forgotten to tuck in the loose covers and tidy the cushions. The room, to her mother's eye, looked undoubtedly shabby and

dishevelled, and for that she would hold Aldous responsible — dear patient Aldous, who never grumbled at what Beth more and more suspected he felt to be the drudgery of his post. They had thought it such a good post when they married; it was still a good post, undoubtedly; but, to her mother, with Belfreys as her standard, even an eminent official in the Board of Education was nearly as obscure as a scholarly country parson; — and how had she come to marry Father? Beth thought, wondering, as she had often wondered, whether the obscure rectory had been grasped at as a mere refuge by the desperate hand of a girl, beautiful, unequipped and threatened with precarious breadwinning. It would have made all the difference to her mother if she had married Sir Anthony, and Beth, as they went down to dinner, felt the familiar thrust of an old pity.

Now they were sitting round the table; it was a pretty table; even her mother must approve Barton's silver and glass. Philippa, her black hair flowing over her shoulders, was all calm and decorum; one would not have believed, to see her sitting there, that she had been the retorting child of an hour ago. She held her grandmother somewhat in awe; she watched her, admired her, and imitated her often,

so that the likeness between them was sometimes almost comical, though Mrs. Oliffe's aquiline features had been shortened and blunted in Philippa's face and it was from her father that the child had the deep cold blue of her eyes and the delicate stubbornness of her profile. Philippa's lower lip did not project; but her teeth, like Aldous's, were set edge to edge and this slight oddity gave to her smile, as to his, a sweet yet rapierlike precision.

'I suppose it was very good,' she was saying, 'but I got tired of one Trio after the other and I do like jazz *much* better than Beethoven!'

Mrs. Oliffe was something of a musician and in her small drawing-room might often be found seated at the grand piano that so overcrowded it, passionately if inaccurately playing Brahms and Chopin.

'You are a baby still,' she smiled — for jazz was too patent a goad to rouse her, 'and like lollipops and balloons and rockets. Rather futile of your mother, I consider, to waste money on taking you to hear real music.'

'It's the music of the future!' Philippa declared; she and her grandmother relished such encounters and she tilted her smile at her. 'Everybody says so.'

'Do they? And who is everybody?'

'The young!' said Philippa. 'We haven't time

for all the old mournful music nowadays! *Everything's* much quicker than it used to be!'

'That's true enough,' Mrs. Oliffe smiled. 'That's quite a motto for the era. — Faster! Faster! Faster! — And it's the Red Queen who has us by the hand as we run; the grim, tenacious embodiment of ugliness.'

'Much more fun than the woolly old White Queen anyway!' cried Philippa, and Beth, who when she could stop being afraid of her mother usually enjoyed her, laughed, looking from one to the other, and said that the Red Queen like the era was rather endearing all the same.

'Endearing? Do you find it so? That's the last word I should apply. At all events it has no use for our affections, you may be sure of that — or, to be exact, for mine, if I had any. You're not quite on the dust-heap yet, Elizabeth.'

'We're going to the Zoo to-morrow, Grannie,' said Philippa, 'one hour with the birds and one in the Aquarium. — I made Ruth and Roger Wedderburn understand that plainly when I asked them. Mummie has tickets for us all, and I think it's so stupid to try and see everything. — Of course if they want to go off to the lions and bears, they may. Billy and Mummie will stay with me, I know.'

'I'm afraid I'll have to go with them if they insist,' said Beth, 'since they're my guests. But it always makes me unhappy to see the lions.'

'Oh, but Mummie — they're simply wild with joy when they get their meat.'

'I know they are. It makes one realise how desperately bored they are to see them so wild. — The Wedderburns are giving a children's party at the end of the Easter holidays, Mother; a play and a dance. Philippa is to be the fairy princess.'

'A dress with stars on it, Grannie, and a wreath on my head,' said Philippa. 'A rather namby-pamby princess she is — but I'll try to make her look different from what she says.' Philippa was talking composedly — Beth felt that with relief — yet not with entire ease, and when her grandmother said: 'You're missing your ride in Richmond Park this week-end, aren't you?' she saw the child change colour.

'Aldous doesn't come back till Monday,' she volunteered, and knew again the deep anxiety that underlay her own lightness. 'It's always on Saturdays they go. — Philippa is getting on so well. They love Richmond Park.'

Did Philippa understand? Did she share her anxiety? It was as if she helped her by running across

the trail, saying ardently: 'But best of all will be going to Brittany this summer. You know it's all settled, Grannie. A little villa just at the edge of the sea. — I shall learn to dive at last and Billy will learn to swim.'

'Fortunate children, indeed. — And to escape hotel life is everything. — Where did you say Aldous was spending the week-end, Beth?'

The blow Beth most dreaded had fallen, and in Philippa's presence. Her mother might not suspect, but Philippa would, the specious readiness with which she answered: 'In Sussex. With old Mr. Chantry — you've heard about him, haven't you? He tutored Aldous at Cambridge and they met again by chance, when I was in Switzerland with the children last winter. Aldous says he's rather amusing and clever — though rather foolish, too. — He used to be some sort of Socialist and dressed in white wool — Aldous says — with an apple in one pocket and a volume of Plato in the other.' With the abundance of her information Beth hoped to divert her mother from further questioning. But ——:

'Chantry?' Mrs. Oliffe repeated, 'no; you've never told me about him, but it must be the one I know of. In Sussex? Yes; there can hardly be two

white-wool Socialists in Sussex. What is the name of his place?'

And now, while Philippa sat as still as a stone, Beth heard herself repeating — as helplessly as before she had helplessly forgotten — the words printed at the top of the grey note-paper: — 'Rest Harrow. Lisletts.' She saw again: 'Darling' written underneath and the Swiss scene, all snow and sun, outside the hotel window where she had read it. What would Philippa make of this effrontery?

'The very same,' said Mrs. Oliffe. 'I've never seen him, but I heard a great deal about him — or rather a great deal about his daughter — from the Pomfrets when I stayed with them. Has Aldous ever come across her, I wonder? I can't imagine anyone he would find less attractive. She's the sort of woman who provides endless themes for country tea-tables. We drove over to call but she wasn't in. She's not often there, I gather. She lives in London and has other fish to fry. Brandon, Cosima Brandon, is her silly name.'

'Ought I to tell her at once that he knows her? Can I say it naturally before Philippa? Is Philippa quite sure now that I didn't tell the truth about the address?' These questions fled through Beth's

mind and before her mother's implications she found herself unable to speak words that must rouse so much astonished comment and query. If Mrs. Brandon was the sort of woman who provided talk for tea-tables and had other fish to fry, what would her mother make of Aldous's intimacy? The moment for speech passed by, and as Beth, concealing her dismay with a fixed firm mien, helped herself to the sweet, she saw in what complicity of understanding her silence bound her to Philippa. Was it not to confess to Philippa how deep was her disquietude? But her mother now pursued her theme.

'He is rather an absurd old person — I could see that from what the Pomfrets said — though they're simple folk and would take Plato in the pocket rather seriously. His wife was one of the rich Trusloves — don't you remember her portrait by Sargent in the Academy, years ago? One of those malicious portraits of his, placating by prettiness, pearls and satin, but exposing, to a discerning eye, all the commonplaceness and triviality. They were very rich people, the Trusloves — and the Chantrys are well-connected. I suppose she imagined she was bettering herself in marrying him. They quarrelled ferociously and she left all her money to the girl. — He hadn't a penny.'

'Oh. How sad,' Beth murmured, with the irrelevance that often characterised her confusion. Her mother's succinct and cutting mirth often confused her.

'Sad? That they quarrelled? Why? Or that the girl got all the money? She was better able to spend it, I imagine, than the old man. At all events she's been, the Pomfrets said, a good daughter and built him his house with the pastoral name — rather a pretty house, what I saw of it.'

'Oh. I'm glad.'

'Glad, my dear Beth? Why, in Heaven's name?'

'If she's good to him, I mean, when he hadn't a penny.'

'Well, in spite of filial devotion, it's evident from what they said that she's a pernicious sort of woman. She thinks herself a beauty and has ink-blot eyes that look as if they'd run on the blotting-paper.' Mrs. Oliffe was enjoying herself.

'How, pernicious, Grannie?' Philippa enquired, and she, too, was enjoying herself.

'She's selfish, crafty and sentimental,' said Mrs. Oliffe with decision, seizing the opportunity to read the younger generation a lesson, though in veiled terms. 'She's never known what it was to deny herself anything, and never hesitated to take what she

wanted, whose-ever the expense. She behaved very badly to her husband and tried to put the blame on him. — *Fausse:* — what the French call *fausse.* — She uses her father's house as a sort of refuge, I imagine, when things don't go as she wishes. — Rest Harrow is really a good name for it — if harrows of that sort ever do rest!' laughed Mrs. Oliffe.

'Bedtime, Philippa,' said Beth. Under all the tumult roused in her by her mother's words ran a sense of disloyalty to Aldous — disloyalty not so much in her own helplessness as that his child should hear such a description of his friend.

Philippa rose obediently, kissed her grandmother, and then paused, her hand on the door. 'Will you come in and say good-night to me, Mummie?'

'Of course, dear.' Philippa had forgiven her. She felt sure of that. Was it because she was glad to have been held back — even if by a prevarication — from staying with the pernicious woman?

'It really has its comical side, Mrs. Brandon's story,' Mrs. Oliffe said at once when the door closed, and that she had bided her time was evident. 'She was in process of divorcing her blameless husband in order to marry a lover when Colonel Brandon died and saved her all the trouble. But for once the ungodly did not prosper; for the lover himself, who

had removed to a distance while the proceedings were in hand, died, too, before she could get to him. So she was left, *plantée là!*'

'Oh! How dreadful! Poor woman!' Beth gazed at her mother, shrinking from her ruthlessness.

'Poor woman! My dear Beth, your tender-heartedness is really a little inane at times! I was immensely pleased to hear of such apt retribution. These scandalous divorces, arranged by the magnanimous partners to shield the greedy deserters, infuriate me. One might respect the deserters who shoulder the odium, but not the ones who want to eat their cake and have it. No: I call it a very moral story.'

'Such a cruel story,' Beth murmured, looking down at her fruit plate. 'So cruel for him, too, the poor lover. Never to see her again.'

'Quite a Tristram and Isolde case, wasn't it,' said Mrs. Oliffe, and her beautiful eyes were as limpidly sparkling as the diamonds in her ears. 'The Pomfrets knew him. I believe Mary Pomfret was rather fond of him. A foolish youth, with nothing much but polo ponies in his head. They knew poor Colonel Brandon too; — I am sorry for him, I own.'

'I feel as if one must be sorry for them all. — And she is the one left to suffer,' said Beth. Yes, it had

been of her suffering that Aldous had been thinking when he put his hand so cherishingly under her elbow to guide her through the press. Something was hurting Beth dreadfully, whether for Cosima Brandon, for herself, or for Aldous she did not know. — How could her mother be so hard?

And Mrs. Oliffe, quartering her orange, said: 'Suffered, my dear? — Not she. She's not the sort who suffers; only who gives suffering. She's the spider type of woman who always has a man in her larder and grows fat and lusty sucking his blood. — Don't waste your pity, I beg.'

When Beth went up to Philippa, half an hour later, leaving her mother at the piano, she found the child lying so still in the dark that she thought she was asleep. Tiptoeing to the bed she bent over it, seeing the small white face, the black hair flooding the pillow. And suddenly Philippa's arms were lifted to her neck and she felt Philippa's cheek pressed to hers — less in tenderness than in a resolute penitence.

'Mummie!' she whispered, with swift, hard utterance — 'forgive me. — I was odious. — I know now you *did* forget.'

'But, Phil ——' Beth faltered, bewildered and blissful, 'why now? — And I did remember for

Grannie, you see. It came back to me at once for Grannie.'

'That's why I knew. If you'd pretended to forget it to me, you'd have pretended to Grannie, more than ever. I'm glad I didn't go, Mummie! I'm glad! I know I should hate her too much.'

'Nonsense, darling! She's Daddy's friend. All that Grannie said was merest gossip. We mustn't think of it.'

'*I'll* think of it. — It was exactly what I ***did*** think!' said Philippa darkly.

CHAPTER IV

AND there stood Aldous and he was angry with her. Yes, angry. His blue eye flashed its arctic flash; no eye colder than Aldous's when he was angry. 'But why couldn't you have sent her by the later train? It's only a mile from the station. We rode all yesterday afternoon and she would have loved it.'

Beth sat in a corner of the sofa and did not look at him. More than fear or answering indignation what she felt at the moment was deep bewilderment. Her head was bent; her hands twisted together in her lap; she had drawn her feet up under her, and, as she tried to think, all that came into her mind was the careful turning of the black-and-silver hat in the tiny circle of the opera-glasses. That seemed to account for everything. She would not have forgotten the address but for that. And that was what she could never show to Aldous. 'I forgot the name of the station,' was all that she found to say. It sounded helpless, indeed; as helpless as in Philippa's ears.

'Forgot Lisletts? Forgot Rest Harrow?' Aldous stared, quite taken aback.

'It went out of my head. I remembered it later on. — But when we got in and found your wire and Philippa wanted to go — it went quite out of my head.' Tears suddenly filled Beth's eyes and feeling them she knew how desperately in need of comfort, reassurance, and tenderness she was. Yet, as she leaned forward, resting her head on her hand and feigning weariness so as to hide them, a cold comfort did steal upon her; for if Aldous could be cruel, it was because he did not suspect himself; and so perhaps there was nothing to suspect; — she caught at the hope; his anger, then, would be a cutting, salutary reality dispelling her sick imaginings. She might be at fault through it all; she must be at fault. And she heard in his next words that already, feeling her deep discomfiture, he was placated.

'Of course; — if you forgot; I'm sorry. — Only I was very much disappointed; and so was Mrs. Brandon. I've talked to her about Philippa.'

'I'm so sorry too. I was tired. I can't think how it happened. — I don't think that you ever told me about Mrs. Brandon.' In the shelter of her hand, surreptitiously drying her eyes, Beth found the comment and glanced up to see Aldous turn to the window, his hands in his pockets, a certain air of arrest, of cogitation, about his tall, thin form.

'Why, I wrote to you from Rest Harrow last winter when she was there.'

'Yes. — But you only said Mr. Chantry's daughter. — Never her name. — I thought of a young girl.'

Aldous was silent for a moment. 'Didn't I ever tell you her name? I took for granted, I suppose, that you knew all about her. She *is* a young girl, really, though she's had so much trouble,' he said, and as he spoke Philippa, all *insouciance*, sailed into the room, and Beth knew in an instant from her look — the arctic anger of her eye veiled by female adroitness — not only that from Philippa her tears were not to be concealed, but that she had been pausing on the landing outside to listen.

'Hello, Daddy,' she said; — 'but I'm really glad Mummie didn't let me go — because Grannie says she's horrid.'

Aldous stood stock-still, staring at his child, and Beth, gazing up at them, felt the hostility that flashed between them with a deep, sick premonition.

'You're talking about Mrs. Brandon, aren't you?' said Philippa, coming to perch lightly on the arm of the sofa beside her mother. 'Well, Grannie says she's horrid, and I think Mummie was quite right not to let me go!'

Icy spears met and splintered above Beth's head; she could not see Philippa, but in Aldous's face she read the force of the impact. He surveyed his child for a moment longer, dropped his gaze for one withering moment on his wife, then walked across the room and left them.

'Philippa!' Beth said brokenly. It seemed to be in her feeble heart that the spears had met and splintered. She was pierced and stricken. 'How can you speak so to your father about his friend!'

'He's made you cry! Because of her! She's not a girl! Daddy's silly to think she's like a girl — and she'll never be *your* friend,' said Philippa with a deadly blitheness.

'I'm *not* crying because of her. — He was disappointed at your not coming. — He couldn't understand — as you couldn't — my forgetting. — Now he will think it was because of what Grannie said.'

'Well — it *was*, really, wasn't it?'

'My forgetting? What do you mean? I knew nothing of her when we found the wire.'

'Why, Mummie — we saw it all for ourselves at the concert — you know we did.'

'I don't know it. — If you thought you did — if you thought her horrid — why were you so eager to go to her and your father?'

'Just because I'm a child — and selfish — and wanted to ride on the Downs!' said Philippa, sitting erect and smiling, 'and besides' — she bent her head down now and her eyes were on her mother's — 'I wanted to show her that I could cut her out.'

'Philippa — you make me very unhappy; — very unhappy indeed. — It's terrible to me to hear a child of mine say such things. — You bewilder me. — You frighten me.'

'Poor darling little Mummie — I suppose I do. — But it's not my fault if I see straight. — You'd like to have me cut her out; — you know you would. You wouldn't dare say it yourself, so I say it for you. That's all there is to it; — really, Mummie.'

Beth rose, stumbling, to her feet. She felt herself trembling. Philippa routed her, for what Philippa said was true. And Aldous had gone upstairs with a fresh, envenomed anger against her. That arctic look in his eyes destroyed her life; reduced her heart to ashes. 'I can't talk about it any more. You've put me into a cruel position with your father. — You've made me too unhappy,' she murmured, leaving the room while Philippa called after her, a note of compunction apparent in her chill young voice:

'I'll make it all right for you. — *He's* the one who's wrong!'

Slowly, drawing deep sighing breaths, Beth went up to her room. The door into the dressing-room was open and she heard Aldous moving about inside it. She shut her own door and stood and waited for a moment. Then, faintly, she said: 'Aldous.'

He appeared on the threshold, rubbing his hands with a towel, and looked at her haughtily.

'You don't understand,' said Beth. She was able to speak unappealingly, but her fear and her appeal were in her face.

'I'm afraid I do,' said Aldous. 'Your mother has filled your ears with scandal about a luckless woman and your forgetfulness is explained.'

'Aldous — you should not say that to me; — you should not. — You know I would not lie to you. — Philippa could tell you; — only we must not bring her in. — That was before. I mean, I forgot the address when we came in and found your wire. — It was later — at dinner — that Mother said harsh things. — I told her I felt them harsh.'

'And what call had she to be asking about Mrs. Brandon? How did you come to be talking Mrs. Brandon over with your mother before Philippa?' Aldous was as shaken as she; but with anger.

He controlled himself; rubbing and rubbing his hands.

'Mother asked where you'd gone. It was perfectly natural: perfectly simple. — She didn't know you knew Mrs. Brandon. She said she was the sort of woman you'd dislike. She merely repeated what she'd heard about her from the neighbours.'

'She didn't know I knew Mrs. Brandon? But you'd had my wire and you knew. You let her talk when a word would have stopped her. It's strange to me to come back to this, after spending my most innocent week-end with a most innocent woman who only asks to be your friend — and Philippa's friend. It was entirely her idea, asking the child: — to give her pleasure. And as it happens Mrs. Brandon *is* the sort of woman I like. I don't thank your mother for her commendation.'

Beth sank down on the edge of her bed and broke into tears. Were they tears, now, of grief, or tears of fear — the deep sick fear rising up again in her heart — as she heard that note of control, that passionate protective protest in Aldous's voice? He did not come to her. He went back into his room and she could still hear him moving about, quietly, methodically, like Philippa; she could see him in imagination standing in his evening black and

white, his head tilted back to tie his tie before the glass. He would stare at himself unseeingly and his lower lip would be set forward in that smiling line that could be either sweet or scornful. She longed for him, and could not control her tears, resting her mind now, above its fear, on its bewilderment. For she had indeed tried to keep clear of all deceit and entanglement.

He came in, now fully dressed, and his face struck upon her tender heart in all its charm and strangeness. He had the strangest Celtic eyes, set high and far apart in his tall Celtic head and not focussing alike; for the left eye, in moments of intent preoccupation, drifted a little outward, so that his gaze travelled away far beyond you. His dry, delicate lips had the look of an eighteenth-century portrait and a vivid red rose easily in his narrow cheek. He came and sat down beside her.

'Don't cry, Beth,' he said, and he put his arm around her. 'You'll make yourself ill. It's not worth it. Please try to stop. — You'll disfigure yourself for dinner.'

Her hand caught at the lapel of his coat and held it, while with the other she tried to staunch her tears. 'You must believe me, Aldous. — I can't bear it if you don't believe me. — I didn't tell

Mother, because, at once, she spoke so harshly — and I was afraid ——'

'Lest my reputation be damaged?'

'No — of course not. Don't be cruel. — It was Philippa who made me afraid — before Mother I mean; — made it difficult for a moment to know what to say. I did not say you did not know her. — I only said nothing.'

'My poor child — what are you driving at?'

Beth pressed her hand on her forehead. 'We were at the concert — Philippa and I — and saw you there, and it made her angry; — already, before Mother spoke, she was angry with Mrs. Brandon. — It was that that confused me. — You know she feels you so entirely hers.'

Aldous sat still, very still, for a moment. 'You were at the Queen's Hall concert on Saturday?'

'Yes. I only saw it in the paper at the last moment. I wanted to hear it — and Philippa to hear it. The Trio, you know; — our Trio.'

He knitted his brows. 'The Trio? They played three Trios. — I was lunching with Mrs. Brandon before going down to Lisletts, and she suggested the concert. — I'd no idea of any subterfuge.' But now a change had come to Aldous's voice and mien, as though he were scanning something unexpected.

And he had forgotten their Trio; completely. He rose. She did not hold him.

'No; no subterfuge. Of course not,' she murmured, looking down. 'We were in the first row of the balcony. Philippa saw you at once.'

'Well, wash your face and dress yourself, my dear, and come down,' said Aldous. 'I'll go to Philippa. Her attitude shocked me, I own. It would have been better to have stopped your mother at once; — you see that now. Philippa will have known at once your reasons for not stopping her; silly reasons. Making too much of her foolishness. — But I'll see her.'

He left her. She heard him running down the stairs eagerly, to make it right with Philippa.

He had forgotten their Trio, thought Beth, sitting weakly collapsed on the bed. If he could forget their Trio, where was the past? She felt herself swinging in a dreamlike mirage — stretching out her hands for some reality; — for what was the present if the past was cut away? And then, as if blindly, thankful for the small shelter, she found a nest and crept within it; for Aldous had been kind, and sorry for her; he had put his arm around her and been sorry even though he found her silly; and she did not care how silly he thought her if only he was

kind. This was reality then; this and Philippa and his love for Philippa, into which the Trio had grown. Her part in Philippa was her part in Aldous, and she rose hastily and began to dress, for was not her part in Philippa small indeed? But, trying to steady her face to sternness as she saw her blurred eyes and shaking lips in the mirror, she repeated the word: 'Silly, silly': — and it was a true word of women; always yearning back to the past; always testing the present by the past — where their lives were rooted. And strangely it flashed upon her, small as was her part in Philippa, it was yet from Philippa that she could look for understanding rather than from Aldous; for already in such understanding Philippa was womanly.

When she went down, standing for a moment outside the drawing-room door to summon her courage before entering, she felt what was almost a flood of happiness in seeing Philippa and Aldous sitting side by side on the sofa looking at an illustrated paper. The two pairs of blue eyes smiled up at her, all candour, as it seemed.

'All's clear, Beth,' said Aldous. 'Grannie is the culprit for gossiping about somebody she doesn't know and I am forgiven for going to the concert with Mrs. Brandon rather than with you and Phil-

ippa' — and he looked now at his daughter with a gay defiance.

Philippa kept silence, smiling slightly, turning her head and looking at the fire; and Beth wondered — feeling the frail happiness spread in her heart like a water-plant on dark waters — whether, with all his power over the child, he understood her as well as she did. No; — once more, she and Philippa were two women. She did not believe that Philippa was satisfied: she only bided her time.

During dinner she told her father about the birds and fish at the Zoo. 'The axolotls are the most *horrible* little creatures, Daddy. You must come with me and see them; — half-fish, half-lizard, and pure white; like little carved Chinese monsters; — like little white bulldogs — their eyes are so far apart and their faces are so snub. — And they lie there at the bottom of the tank, with their feet against the glass, and look straight at you! — And then, suddenly, they glide upwards, with their fins — or paws — faintly moving. — It's frightful! It's like a nightmare! I shall see them in a dream, the next time I'm unhappy!'

Aldous's eyes rested in appreciation on his child. They deeply delighted in each other, those two. Theirs was not merely the instinctive devotion of

father and daughter, but the intercourse of delicately matched, delicately differing minds. They interested each other: they charmed each other: — and what had Philippa said? — 'You'd like to have me cut her out?' Hateful, with its hint of the truth; for was not all the panic in her heart tranquillized by the thought of Philippa's power over her father? Philippa was her bulwark. And, listening to them, watching them as they gaily sparred and talked, Beth felt the humiliation of her safety.

After dinner, when Philippa had gone to bed, Aldous in the drawing-room said at once: 'Beth, will it bore you if I tell you about Mrs. Brandon? Then all this little history will be cleared up and we can enjoy life again.'

'Oh — please do. — Please, Aldous. I saw that Mother was unfair; — that people had gossiped without understanding. Even what she said made me sorry for Mrs. Brandon.' Beth leaned forward to her knitting-bag and drew out the stocking she was making for Billy. Under all the happiness her heart had still a bruised sensation as though it had been caught and crushed.

'You would be. You're just the person who would be sorry for her,' said Aldous, 'and her story needs understanding.' She saw, as he moved to the fire

and stood looking down at it, his hands in his pockets, that he was considering how best to approach the story. 'She's the sort of woman who cuts herself,' he said, and as she heard the words Beth knew that he himself found them unexpected. They came with a change of tone and he paused after speaking them, and listened to them. They had, indeed, said more, much more, than he had known they would say.

'Cuts herself?' Beth repeated gently. She saw his trouble and helped him.

'Yes,' Aldous, his back to her, nodded. 'As if she had a knife in her hand and everything that came to her came with blood on it.'

But these were not Aldous's words; they were remembered words, rising from the depths of his heart. They were the words with which Mrs. Brandon had described herself to him. Beth listened to her husband's voice and to what it betrayed of passionate pity, nerving herself to understand and not to feel; nerving herself to be the trusted wife — only if she could endure to hear such confidences would she be trusted. Aldous would shut himself and his treasure away from her — unless she could endure.

'She was hardly more than a child when she

married,' said Aldous. 'She'd had a miserable childhood — torn about between a selfish father and mother; — they did not get on and she was their bone of contention and she married the first man who asked her; — to escape. He was twenty years her senior, drank too much, gambled, and was insanely jealous; she suffered a year of martyrdom and then they parted. She never lived with him again. That was ten or twelve years ago; just before the War; and three or four years ago she met a man who really loved her.' Aldous now was walking slowly up and down, pausing at each end of the room to look, unseeingly, first at the portrait of the children, and then at the Chinese painting. 'Brandon was quite willing that she should divorce him, and proceedings were already instituted when he died. Within a fortnight the other man died, too. He had gone out to India to keep the issues clear, and they never saw each other again. — That was why I never said much about her. She was completely crushed when I first met her, last winter, down at Rest Harrow.'

'Yes. I see,' Beth murmured. Aldous, his back to her, stood looking up at the children's portrait. 'It's the same story that Mother heard, really. It's the sort of story that can be so hatefully twisted.'

'Yes. Can't it!' Gratitude was in his voice. He turned, and his eyes with their careful frankness were on her. 'She knows how it's twisted — by her father's neighbours: — not that that affects her much. She and her father are both very independent of such tattle and her world is the London world; a big one.'

'She goes out a great deal?'

'Not much. He died over a year ago — but it's like yesterday to her and she's not ready yet for people. I'd have asked you to call on her before this if she had been. When I met her first, last winter, she hardly spoke at all; sat and brooded over the fire. Poor old Chantry was badly worried about her. I persuaded her to come out for rides with me and we read and I got her to the piano and she took up her practising again. But it's still an obsession with her — that she caused his death.'

'Oh; — poor woman.' Beth said it as she said it to her mother; yet with less, now, of involuntary pity. Her mind, startled for all its discipline, was traversing the scenes of succour set before her by Aldous. 'Yes, I saw, on Saturday, that she was sad; — that she'd been through something.'

'It quite takes me aback, sometimes,' said Aldous, 'to realise what she's been through. She's

hardly more than a girl and yet she can make me feel immature. — Are you going up to say good-night to Philippa? Won't she be expecting you?'

'I don't think specially. She didn't ask me specially.' But Beth rose and Aldous's eyes rested on her.

'Set the child's mind at rest, will you, Beth? It's hateful that such ideas should have lodged in it.'

Beth paused on her way to the door. 'Did you tell her you were going to talk it over with me?'

'Yes,' Aldous nodded. 'I couldn't really explain anything to her, of course; — what the grounds for gossip were, I mean — I knew that you and I could get it clear.'

Philippa's sidelong glance was now interpreted. She awaited her mother's verdict and could well afford to mark time with axolotls. 'Get it clear,' Beth repeated to herself, going up the stairs. Was it so clear? To Philippa she must pretend clarity.

Philippa was waiting for her and she raised herself on her elbow as her mother entered. 'Well?' she questioned.

Beth closed the door, trying to think. 'You didn't ask me to come,' she said.

'No; but I knew Daddy would,' said Philippa.

'Has he made you like her? Will you go and see her and bring her here?'

Beth felt her heart beating in her side as she went slowly towards the bed. 'The trusted wife,' she was saying to herself, and, when she spoke, the sound of her own voice, its light, kind resource, astonished her. 'It's all too absurd, Phil,' she said, and she sat down on the edge of the bed — 'except that it did give me a very bad quarter of an hour; — and Daddy. Poor Daddy! What a reception for him! You know, don't you, that you were very wrong in speaking so?'

'Yes. I know. — What did Daddy tell you?'

'He told me all about Mrs. Brandon. She's evidently charming and I'm going to see her very soon. She's had a very sad time, Philippa.'

Philippa lay still; very still. She did not lift her arms to her mother's neck as on the other night. 'What sort of a sad time?' she asked. 'Grannie said it was other people she made sad. Grannie said the sort of things I'd have expected to hear about her. *Fausse* was just the right word, I thought, for the way she looked round when she went out with Daddy. — She wasn't feeling nearly as mournful as she looked.'

Beth's heart beat more heavily; Philippa must al-

most hear it beat. 'Grannie doesn't know her and your father does. Her husband died and the man she loved and was to have married died, too, and she's broken-hearted.'

'Well — she can't be broken-hearted about them *both*,' Philippa commented. 'She must have been very glad when her husband died — if she wanted to marry the other.'

'I didn't mean that she cared for her husband. He was unkind to her and she had to leave him. She is broken-hearted because of the man who loved her.'

'That's why she wears black, I suppose,' said Philippa, after another receptive pause. 'That's why her hat made everyone else's so dowdy.'

'Philippa — please don't be tiresome! — You've already made things difficult enough to-night!' Beth spoke with sudden fretfulness that controlled sudden tears. Why would Philippa always intolerably voice her own instinct? — And, once more, Philippa was clear-sighted.

'What a shame, Mummie darling!' she exclaimed, and she now put her arms around her. 'I'm such a little beast — and Daddy's already made you cry!'

'It was *you* who made me cry,' Beth articulated with difficulty. 'It was because of what you said

that Daddy was so angry with me. — You are certainly a very naughty little girl sometimes — darling,' for Philippa was kissing her — once, twice, thrice, lightly on the cheek and saying now, not really contrite yet candidly caressing:

'I won't be horrid any more, since you say she's charming. I'll like her most awfully — if you do!'

CHAPTER V

BETH, standing in the middle of Mrs. Brandon's drawing-room, felt herself bewildered. She was not unused to pomps and splendours. She had been presented in that far-away London season and, as the rector's daughter, had dined at big houses and attended hunt balls; and though since her marriage the cares of family life, and small resources, had hedged her round with sobriety, she and Aldous were still partakers of gaieties almost brilliant and knew sophisticated drawing-rooms. Mrs. Brandon's was not splendid or pompous, but it was more than sophisticated; it was magical, and whether with a kind or a menacing magic Beth could not tell; only feeling, as she stood there in the black-and-silver and crystal and flame, that it was alien. She knew that she could never look smart; Philippa's eye would have kept her aware of that, even if she had attempted smartness; but she had never before — and after an unaccustomed concentration on her dress — felt definitely dowdy, and her recognition of her own inappropriateness was rooted in a physical sensation of heat and suffoca-

tion. Anyone to be comfortable in this soft, scented atmosphere must be garbed like a sylph; yet Philippa would have approved of her choice of wool and fur on a day when the wind at street corners seemed to slash your shoulder-blades and sting your ankles. Surreptitiously, quelling a craven flutter, she loosened her collar, looking round her, while a sense of familiarity slowly matched itself with her memories telling her that she ought to have been prepared for it; it had all been indicated at the concert in her apprehension of Mrs. Brandon's meaning. Indolent, wayward, perhaps impertinent, Mrs. Brandon's meaning glimmered at her from crimson Chinese cabinets, from heaped black cushions tasselled with silver, from branches of magnolia slanting across a corner of silver wall. Great logs, piled as if to a Circe's behest, glowed under a mantelshelf set with crystal shapes and, in the long mirror behind them, Beth saw reflected her own small, tense face — fawn-colour with wide fawn-coloured eyes — and the exquisite chandelier of grey glass that, above her head, emerged into the silver air, softly, like an apparition. All that was needed, she thought, as her eye travelled to the bowls of Roman anemones, floating clotted colours on dark surfaces, was the song of a caged bulbul, passionate and protesting;

and as the door opened and she heard behind her a silken movement, she clung to this last impression: for she hoped that she might be able to be sorry for Aldous's friend.

'How *too* delightful of you to come!' These were the words with which her hostess greeted her. Beth, whose simple code admitted only of reserve or cordiality, knew in a moment that the meeting had never been intended by Mrs. Brandon. It had been to content Aldous that she had assented to it. Her smile, a crucible in which eyes and teeth and pearls were all transmuted, wove a circle about them, a circle in which she flowed, all ease and artifice, but which secured her opponent — if that was the correct word — in a helpless if attentive rigidity. '*Do* sit down,' she urged. — '*Do* take off your coat'; — and she leaned from the sofa to draw a glass screen between Beth and the fire.

She herself wore her transparent blacks, falling apart at the breast, falling away from the arms, and the pearls, in which she twisted the fingers of one hand, stooping to catch up with the other a black pug who had followed her into the room. 'Mother's belovèd precious lamb!' she murmured, mumbling him with kisses.

Beth pushed down her coat, remembering, as she

felt her face grow hot, that Philippa had said: 'Your eyes look light and your face dark when you blush.'

'I've so wanted to know you; for ages simply,' said Mrs. Brandon, kissing the pug, whose melancholy did not seem appeased by these caresses. 'It's absurd, isn't it, how impossible it sometimes is to meet in London. — And I've been away so much.'

'Yes. — Isn't it. I was away last winter, too. It was then that my husband met you, wasn't it, in Sussex?'

'He was so *marvellously* kind to me,' said Mrs. Brandon, looking up at her over the pug's head, her cheek laid against his shoulder. 'I can never be grateful enough for what he did. He made me take up my riding and my music again — and my Italian; for Dante. How divinely he reads Dante, doesn't he?'

'Yes. He does read well.' Beth looked away up at the magnolia. 'How lovely — to have a great branch like that. — I only see them in Kew Gardens now.'

'Aren't they divine? A friend in the country sends them to me. He rifles his garden — he's marvellously kind, too — like your husband,' said Mrs. Brandon, willing perhaps to make clear that she depended on no one ministrant. Philippa had

been right about her. She was in sober reality, though young, a sallow, sickly woman, flattish, faded and jaded. Yet sober reality was the last thing that the ministrant eye would detect in looking at Mrs. Brandon, for, like her drawing-room, she had the quality of magic, and if an artificial adventitious magic, still her own by choice and dexterity. Her soft pouting mouth was tinted like a rose and its smile enclosed teeth that seemed as much a part of her decoration as her pearls seemed a part of her person; her large eyes dwelt with a certain latent malice, veiling itself in melancholy; her arms and throat and cheeks were washed with pallor; her clustered hair was wayward yet composed. Languidly collapsed, caressing her pug, she leaned among her cushions, and if Beth saw in her face ill-temper and idleness and the gnawing of deep discontent, the ministrant would see only hapless youth and enchantment. 'And she *is* enchanting: and she *has* suffered,' thought Beth, grasping the talisman.

'Aldous told me that you wrote poetry when you were a girl,' said Mrs. Brandon, drawing the pug more closely to her breast as the footman placed the tea-table. 'About birds and the country — did you have a magnolia in your garden? — and saying one's

prayers. — "Invocations": wasn't that the title? A darling title. So like a girl.'

'Yes. "Invocations." — We are all capable of a volume of verse, I suppose, when we are young.' 'Aldous; Aldous,' Beth was saying to herself. 'She calls him Aldous.'

'Are we?' Mrs. Brandon smiled. 'I wasn't. Mine at all events was suppressed. — Does Philippa write poetry?'

'Not yet. Not that I know of. — But my mother never knew that I was writing poetry! — I was older than Philippa, of course. Philippa is only a child.'

The Trio had been shared with Mrs. Brandon and her own part in it forgotten: and Aldous had no longer time to read Dante with her; and he had trusted and cared for Mrs. Brandon enough to tell her about the poor little verses, sacred to their early love. Beth had summoned an answering smile, but her hat was hot upon her brow; her ears were hot under her braids. She wished she were not there.

'I know. There's little that I don't know about Philippa,' said Mrs. Brandon, warming the tea-pot. 'It's a case of love me love my dog with Aldous and Philippa, isn't it?' — Did not the malice just glint from the melancholy? — 'He so dotes upon her.

The only thing he can't give me is a sense of what she really looks like; though he owned that her eyes are like his.'

'Yes, they are like his. Only darker.'

'Celtic eyes I always think,' said Mrs. Brandon. 'Jacobite eyes. — Prince Charlie hiding, so safely, in them. — I always see Aldous with kilt and dagger and spray of white heather.'

She might not have written girlish verse, but she could see Aldous in terms of poetry. Beth, forced into a community of vision, could only acquiesce. 'Yes; he is like that. Yes: that is Aldous. — Though it's the merest drop of Highland blood, you know.'

'The merest drop tells, doesn't it — like the merest drop of Semitic — as much as wine in water,' said Mrs. Brandon. 'So loyal yet so inhuman.'

'Inhuman?'

'Not Aldous, individually, perhaps; — I don't know him well enough to say; but the Jacobite strain. So kind if it's fond, but capable of such unkindness if it's not. — Heather for the friend; the dagger for the foe. — His mother's father and mother were both Scotch, weren't they?'

'Yes, both Scotch. But only his grandmother had the Highland blood. I believe she was very much

like Aldous. We have a portrait of her that has just his eyes.' Helplessly she talked to Mrs. Brandon about Aldous.

'She was very learned, very high-brow, too, wasn't she? She read philosophy. I always think Aldous ought to have been a philosopher. — He ought to have written books about how we think and why we think and what's the good of thinking — oughtn't he — instead of grinding at a Government Office? — Isn't it queer the way most men spend their lives! — Frightfully dreary, as a rule — when they're not conquerors or statesmen or artists — don't you feel?' Mrs. Brandon measured in the tea and the vapour from the kettle wreathed before her face and arms so that more than ever she was a Circe. 'We women have much the best of it, haven't we; — with cosy things to think about all day — like new dresses and children — and tea!'

'But they enjoy the children, too — and they sometimes come home to tea,' Beth rallied her forces to suggest — (*Was* Aldous dreary and ground down? Had he told Mrs. Brandon that he was dreary?) — 'And I expect that they often find their work very interesting.' To which Mrs. Brandon, rather sadly, and with a touch of reproof, rejoined: 'We mustn't be too sanguine!'

A little silence fell then. She could not go before she had had her tea. She must sit there, secured between the kettle and the glass screen, hotter and hotter, her brow now moist beneath her hat, and try to ward off thoughts that pressed in — did they not leer in upon her? — like the *chimères* on Notre Dame, Beth saw them, suddenly — pressing close, chins on hands, tongues lolling — contemplating her in her discomfiture — the dowdy little wife who took it for granted that her husband enjoyed grinding away his life to keep her and the children cosy; while Circe — aware of everything surely, intending everything? — yet intended more than all to seem only sweet, for she went on presently: 'Aldous says you have the most adorable little garden behind your house. — Will you let me come and see it some day? — He says you can make things grow anywhere. — You are a real country-woman, aren't you, while I am an arrant Cockney and have simply to *pore* over books to get things coming, decently and in order, down in Sussex, in my father's garden. — But Aldous only said: "You should see Beth's hepaticas." — Oh, Lorrimer, darling! — *How* angelic of you to come so soon! When did you arrive? And Timmie!' Sliding pug to the ground Mrs. Brandon rose to greet a lady, plump, ageing, but

very tight in the hip and short in the skirt, who darted with immense enthusiasm into the room, her arms extended.

'Carissima!' she exclaimed, embracing Mrs. Brandon. — 'Last night, my child! — Carissimo!' and she stooped to the pug and would have embraced him, but, evading her, he placed himself under the tea-table. Timmie, a pale young man, fat, affable, or seemingly so, and dressed in the height of fashion, took the chair next Beth, and Mrs. Cranley — such was her name — sinking down beside Mrs. Brandon on the sofa, cried: 'Cosima, my precious, *have* you ever seen Ferdy on a camel! Catastrophically comical! — And mine ran away with me and I had to be hunted down!'

'I'm far more interested in Paris than in Egypt,' Mrs. Brandon smiled. 'Your dress is a dream, Lorrimer. *Are* evening skirts really longer? — Sugar?' she questioned Beth, dropping in the lump — 'and *do* have a macaroon.'

'Shorter if anything — and my legs are beginning to spell disaster!' Mrs. Cranley replied, stretching them forth. — 'I declared two in the Customs and smuggled two in my boxes and Ferdy brought the ewe-lamb wound round his body over his undies! Actually! Wasn't it marital devotion! — He looked

like a fat odalisque when I undressed him!' Mrs. Cranley's long malicious teeth and darting eyes filled Beth with apprehension. Timmie at her side, crunching macaroons with immense gusto, seemed to promise more of the milk of human kindness and she craved escape from her sense of awkwardness. 'I went to Egypt, long ago, when I was a girl,' she said to him timidly, for her cheeks felt so hot that it was difficult to speak with ease. 'My father was very much interested in the excavations — long before Tutankhamen, of course; but such beautiful furniture, like Empire furniture. — Is it in the Museum now at Cairo?'

But Timmie's affability did not commit him to more than passing macaroons to an outsider and his eye drifted relegatingly, if blandly, over her, as he answered: 'We didn't bother over museums,' and turned to his hostess to cry: 'Miriam joined us, you know. — Did you hear about Miriam? — Yes, my dear, she spouted Gertrude Stein from under the Sphinx's jaws! — looking like a boiled lobster! — She wore her favourite homicidal red and you know the blue-black fixity of a lobster's eye!'

'I adore Miriam,' said Mrs. Brandon. 'There's no one like her in the world. *Won't* you have another cup? — Some cake? — She's written a sonnet

to me. *Je ne comprends pas un mot de ce qu'elle dit, mais elle a parfaitement raison.* — You are a malicious toad, Timmie. — Tell me, what do they *really* say in Paris about Proust?'

'We can admire him safely for two years more!' cried Timmie, and now, feeling that there was indeed no foothold for her, Beth rose and her loosened coat slid to the ground so that her head bumped against Timmie's as they stooped together to retrieve it; and although Mrs. Brandon's teeth and smile and pearls wove their magic about her, protecting, reassuring, making all smooth for her departure as she murmured: '*Must* you go? — It's been *too* delightful — And *may* I come to see the garden some day?' — Beth, leaving the black-and-silver drawing-room, felt routed and ridiculous.

She almost felt herself fleeing from the house, and as she walked rapidly round the sunny square, it was at first with only a sense of relief, of escape. The glass screen, the hot hat, Proust and Mrs. Cranley's bared canine teeth were safely behind her. This breathlessness, this haste to be away, revealed her as inadequate to the situation from which she had just come and humiliation was a mean sentiment. Yet one might feel it as warmth and shelter. Yes, let her cower in its cover as long as possible, for

worse, far worse, awaited her in the open, and, as she turned into the Bayswater Road and heard the 'buses roar and clash beside her, the panther fear sprang suddenly upon her, grown terrifically since first seen in the tiny circle of the opera-glasses. How long it had been! — how sweet, how secret, their friendship, and how beautiful she was in Aldous's eyes! Standing on the kerb, gazing at the checked traffic and letting the opportunity to cross pass by, it was with Aldous's eyes that Beth was seeing Mrs. Brandon. Her smile caressed; her white hand supplicated; she was sorrowful, yet there was no menace to peace in her sorrow; no poignancy such as Aldous shrank from; it was an elegiac sorrow; a dulcet minor harmony accompanying her movements and gestures; a branch of magnolia crossing a silver wall behind her pensive head. 'The only way is to be generous; generous and trusting,' she thought, walking on without crossing, gazing intently before her, hearing the unspoken words echo within her as if from the voices of generations of frightened wives. — Frightened. Wives were frightened: not husbands: it was not the mark of a husband to know fear; only of a lover; and were wives lovers then? And husbands not? 'But I couldn't afford to dress like that — even if I were

as slender as a snake,' she thought, and trying to visualise herself in those subtle garments she ran into a woman who muttered indignantly, turning her disarrayed head and setting her hat straight. 'I'm so sorry,' she said, 'oh, I'm so sorry!' — The little shock, the sense of stupidity with its mocking comment on her imaginings, brought tears to Beth's eyes. 'What did Philippa say? — "Bundling along." — No one who bundles could ever wear those clothes. And the reason I was inadequate was because I was afraid, and that's why I'm malicious now. — She is not afraid. She has nothing to be afraid of. Nothing in me,' she said to herself, crossing now and going into the Park. 'Nothing; — except Philippa — and she's not really mine, but Aldous's.'

The tears still stood unshed, and she closed her eyes tightly from time to time as she walked, taking a transverse path that led to the Serpentine. And suddenly, thinking of the past, she saw Aldous sitting at her knee before the fire in the first year of their marriage, reading Dante aloud to her. She learned Italian during their engagement to read Dante with him, and while he read she made the miraculous clothes for the coming baby, who had been Christopher. Fear, in that lovely time, would

have seemed a desecration of their love. Her ship of life had floated in harbour on a deep sea of security; and if change had come, if with the passing years Aldous, harassed and weary, had chosen rather, in the evenings at home, to extend himself and sleep than go on to the 'Paradiso,' that, she had felt, watching quietly over him while she darned stockings or worked at committee papers, was only a deepening of unity. And now she saw herself cast adrift on a lonely beach from which the tide, long since receded, showed only in a far shining line on the horizon.

Was it always so with middle-aged wives, she asked, hurrying as if pursued among the iron railings and green expanses where sooty London sheep were grazing? Did wives who stayed in love always end by being stranded? But one must be reasonable, she told herself, trying to quell her throbbing heart and putting her cold glove up to her hot cheek. There was a time for all things. Her blossoming time was over; she had become the soil, the fruitful soil of life into which the blossoms crumbled. Her meaning was the meaning of the young lives rooted in her. She must school herself and quell this craving, girlish heart; yet a sob seemed to rise from it as it felt itself thus subdued, and was it

merely girlish to crave? Was it not the very mark of one's womanhood to go on craving an enhancement of life no longer relevant? Why should Aldous blossom and she be soil? He found enhancement now in Mrs. Brandon.

She had come to the Serpentine. It was a cold late spring and people were feeding gulls at the edge of the water and their wings tossed and swooped on the ashen rose of the London sunset. Beth paused and looked at them unseeingly while bitter truth slowly pierced her. 'The man is wanted,' she thought. 'The woman isn't. What he finds in Mrs. Brandon, what I find in him, he doesn't find in me. Why should men alter and we not? We need love just the same.' And, trying to see clearly through her pain, looking up at the gulls who drove down through the air like relentless angels, a tragic cleavage in humanity dimly revealed itself. For women, the same love was enhancement; for men, to be enhancement, it must be a different love.

CHAPTER VI

BETH took a 'bus at Knightsbridge and when she alighted it was late; the evening already a powdery Japanese blue. Her cheeks were cool at last and her heart, it seemed to her, beating quietly if heavily in her side. As she walked down Gloucester Road, she saw Aldous approaching her, coming up from the Underground Station. He did not see her and she watched him as he came, slowly, his hands clasped behind him on his stick. Aldous usually walked swiftly; this evening he was meditating; on the meeting between her and Mrs. Brandon, no doubt, and for the first time in her life, as she looked at him, Beth knew a stricture rather than an expansion of the heart. Kilt, dagger, spray of heather; how well his friend already knew him. Even in correct official attire Aldous looked always a little wild and unpredictable and this evening his demeanour had a spellbound quality. She knew from the poise of his head that his widely-set eyes were gazing sideways, unaware of the hurrying street, and perhaps he was just smiling his cool cogitative smile, full of good hope and auguring

well from the meeting he had so carefully arranged. She had come quite near before he saw her. 'Generous and trusting,' the words rose to Beth's mind, and indeed, as she turned and walked beside him, how calm and cool she felt: — as though with an attained security. All the anxiety and fever that had assailed her in Mrs. Brandon's drawing-room seemed fallen from her. She smiled calmly at him as though nothing of any consequence had been happening, as though the visit to Mrs. Brandon were too casual an experience to be remembered at the moment, and said: 'Isn't it extraordinarily cold for April? It was almost like winter, seeing the seagulls being fed in the Park.' And remembering the gulls she felt in her own heart, rather than saw, that relentless driving down, as of a dagger, and knew that rather than trust or generosity it was bitterness that upheld her. 'He shall speak of her first,' she thought. 'Why should I make it easy for him?'

Aldous walked, his hands still clasped behind him, and she knew that he was looking expectantly down at her. Yes; it was upon her, the wife, that he ultimately depended; she saw her strength as she walked there; home; children; position, all depended upon her; compared with her reality Mrs. Brandon was a wraith, a phantom, and she could

afford to smile at her — were it not that such smiling would hurt too horribly; for while Aldous must pretend to the world that Mrs. Brandon was the wraith, the mere casual friend, what he asked of the wife was to keep up the pretence for him, but with him recognise that the other was a friend so dear that his very life now was centred in her.

'I've found a lovely chintz for the drawing-room,' she said, and, under the glassy artifice of her voice, deep was the tumult — 'rather expensive; but I've saved it out of the housekeeping money; wreaths and birds on a pale-green ground; lovely with the white walls, and the old one was so shabby. With a new chintz we must think about some little bridge-parties this spring; Frank and Marcia; and Mother and Sir Maurice; — you've never met him. He's back from India, you know. — And Philippa is clamouring for dances. There's plenty of room if the furniture is pushed back.'

Aldous kept silence. They had turned the corner of their own little street and were now approaching the house. Above their heads were branches of budding cherry, hawthorn and laburnum, and remembering the long-ago evening when the two young lovers had first seen the trees in flower, Beth was suddenly aware of how far towards alienation her

pretence already had carried them. It seemed to her, as she felt the repudiating quality of his silence, that there had never been real discord between them till now when, neither pitying nor understanding the compulsion that lay beneath her subterfuge, he looked steadily before him gathering his pride about him in cold resentment. He would ask no question. — What was to happen next, if he asked no question?

They reached the house. He opened the gate for her, stood back to let her pass, followed her up the steps and got out his latchkey, and even before the door opened she was aware of the sound of the piano in the drawing-room, the Chopin Scherzo pouring out into the evening, over the budding trees, over her and Aldous's resentful hearts. It was her mother playing — rather absurdly, rather magnificently, as usual — and, swept from the orbit of her own wretchedness by the challenging splendour, Beth in imagination saw not only the familiar pearls and rubies moving over the keys, but her mother's eye, caustic and mellifluous, as it would in another moment rest on Aldous. Philippa would be there, listening, of course: before Philippa it would not be possible to avoid reference to the visit; and with a drop of terror she knew that once the visit was men-

tioned her mother would guess everything; everything, in a moment, unless she could contrive, for Aldous and herself, some shelter. What was this folly that had oppressed her senses? As she went swiftly before Aldous up the stairs, Mrs. Brandon receded to the circle of the opera-glasses. Aldous was her husband and needed protection. Warm fountains of courage and resource were released in her.

Philippa was sitting curled up in a corner of the sofa, Chuffie in her lap, her head resting against a cushion. She wore her dress of azure lawn, the colour of a flax flower. Billy was sitting at his mother's bureau with his plasticine and a modelling-board; the drawing-room was as untidy as the children's presence and her absence always made it.

'Well, darling,' she whispered, pausing to lay her hand on Billy's shoulder and glance down at his modelling, while Philippa, smiling up at her father, put out her hand and drew him down beside her. Beth went and stood before the fire, pulling off her coat and tossing it on a chair while inspiration grew within her. The Scherzo was approaching its end, and Philippa's face was fixed upon the music. She listened intently, drinking in the fierce ardour with delight, drawing a deep sigh, glancing round in

silence at her father as the last chord sounded; and looking down at her Aldous slightly nodded, slipping his arm behind her.

'Well, Beth,' said Mrs. Oliffe. She still sat on at the piano, her hands fallen in her lap while the splendour faded from her eyes and mundane alertness returned. 'And where have you been? I've waited half an hour.'

'You'll never guess,' said Beth. She took off her hat and passed her hands over her ruffled braids. She felt young and strong and adequate. She felt like the soil, but like the blossoming tree as well, like a woman whose husband might still be in love with her. 'I've been making friends with Mrs. Brandon,' she said, and strongly sustained on her wave of intuition and resource saw herself, in the eyes of Aldous raised to hers, in Philippa's eyes, doing something they would, both of them, feel as rather gallant, would silently applaud, as they had applauded the Scherzo. Yes; they both of them knew, the man and the child, that she was playing up; and for whom.

'Mrs. Brandon?' Her mother repeated the name and mellifluousness did not conceal astonishment. 'Cosima Brandon?' She struck softly an ambiguous chord. 'Why, my dear?'

'I thought it would surprise you — after that talk last week. But Aldous does know her and asked me to go and see her. I've just been,' said Beth smiling, 'and she's charming.'

Her mother sat and gazed at her; then her gaze dropped on Aldous; but Aldous had his arm round Philippa. Aldous had his alibi. His face told her nothing. Beth did not look at him, but she knew that so far he was safe.

'Really,' said Mrs. Oliffe. 'Well; that is very interesting. — And of course I trust your judgment, and Aldous's.' Beth had known that she might count upon her mother's manners; they never failed; but she knew how much they could conceal.

'Oh — do tell us about her, Mummie,' said Philippa, her head leaning back against her father's shoulder while Mrs. Oliffe, her hand still on the keys, added another note, altered another in her ambiguous chord, softly modulating it to a faintly jocose sequence. 'Has she eyes like ink-blots that have run on the blotting-paper?'

'That's rude, Philippa,' Mrs. Oliffe observed, though her glance at her grandchild did not conceal a glint of satisfaction. 'You know that my idle words were merest hearsay.'

'Why rude, Grannie?' Philippa enquired, all

specious innocence. 'Why shouldn't her eyes be too big? — The bigger the prettier some people think. — Do *you* think she's pretty, Daddy?' And Philippa turned her smiling face to look up into his eyes.

A fly might have buzzed rather than a whip flickered against Aldous's cheek. Beth could read the slight annoyance of his gaze and knew that his mother-in-law's chord had stung rather than his child's question; but to Philippa much would be forgiven. His left eye drifted faintly outward as he answered, reaching over to scratch Chuffie's breast: 'Her eyes are too big, I dare say. I don't notice shapes and sizes much.'

'And you do think her charming — as Mummie does?' said Philippa, and did he not feel the echo of the ambiguous chord in her pellucid voice?

'Yes, charming, as Mummie does; even if not pretty.' There was now an edge to his smile, for even with Philippa he could lose his temper.

'She has the most marvellous drawing-room,' said Beth; 'it only wants a caged bulbul singing in it to make it pure Arabian Nights — and such a clever pug. — You would adore her drawing-room, Mother, and Philippa would adore her pug.'

'How is he clever?' asked Philippa. 'Does he do tricks?'

To herself Beth had really meant that the pug saw through his mistress and she warned herself now against too much elaboration. 'No: — at least I saw none; but pugs *are* clever, aren't they; — disenchanted, unemotional, compared to other dogs.'

Philippa's eyes were on her appreciatively. 'Did she admire your dress, do you think?' she asked, scanning it. 'Isn't Mummie's dress pretty, Daddy? I helped her to choose that colour; — Miss Bateson, though she does call herself a Court dressmaker, doesn't cut backs very well; but nobody sees backs much — sitting at tea in a drawing-room.'

'It didn't go with the drawing-room, I own,' said Beth, 'and perhaps when I went out my back was noticed — for they were all very smart.' And Aldous murmured that her dress was very pretty, and Mrs. Oliffe enquired, rising from the piano: 'Have you known them long, Aldous — the clever lady and the charming pug?' And, without waiting for an answer, she went on: 'What I really came to ask, Beth, was whether you and Aldous would dine with me on Friday. Sir Maurice will be there.'

'I think so. Yes. Friday is free, isn't it, Aldous?'

'May I let you know? I think so, but I'm not sure.' Aldous was very polite, but his politeness was

touched with frost. He still had his arm round Philippa and still pulled gently at Chuffie's ruff.

'Well — I really must know now — That's why I came, and why I waited; to make sure. I shall have to telephone to another couple to-night — if you and Beth fail me.'

Aldous found his note-book and turned its pages, and as she watched him and saw that he gave himself time to think, Beth knew that he was spending Friday evening with Mrs. Brandon.

'Oh. Too bad. I'm engaged,' he said, finding the page.

Mrs. Oliffe maintained her surface. 'Very well. Another time for your meeting. The Bentleys will be free, I expect. Good-bye, Philippa; good-bye, Billy.' Mrs. Oliffe drew her fur around her shoulders and kissed her grandchildren. 'All the same,' she remarked, as Beth followed her down the stairs, 'I don't think I'd introduce Philippa and the pug if I were you. It's quite all right for you to call on her, of course, and for Aldous *à plus forte raison*; but it's not a *milieu* for the child. I wrote to the Pomfrets about her after our talk. Undoubtedly the unfortunate young polo player was her lover: — to say nothing of others.'

'Oh — but, Mother ——' They had come to the

door and Beth paused there with her hand on the latch. 'You may be as mistaken about that as about the rest.'

'The rest? What more was there? Even Aldous agrees that her eyes are too big,' smiled Mrs. Oliffe, while Beth wondered anew at a mother who could deeply love and could yet be so cruel, for did she not know how cruel it was to say 'even Aldous'? 'I've nothing to say against the lady except that she isn't our sort. — We are old-fashioned and respectable barnyard fowls, Beth, and it's no use pretending that we are caged bulbuls.'

'But, Mother, one needn't be old-fashioned to be respectable.'

'I fear one must, my dear. I really fear one is relegated to the world of maiden aunts and anti-macassars if one objects to lovers.'

'But it was she who was divorcing her husband ——' Beth reminded her, though knowing how irrelevant where Mrs. Brandon was concerned such reminders were; but she must build her rampart before Aldous; and going down the steps Mrs. Oliffe laughed back at her: 'Of course she was. As I told you. She lets other people do the unpleasant things for her.'

Beth went slowly upstairs. She was more in need

of ramparts than Aldous. He could protect himself far better than she. Her mind dwelt confusedly, painfully on the problem presented by her mother's warning. Mrs. Brandon would now call upon her, would she not? Mrs. Brandon would now openly occupy a place in their life, and how should she withdraw Philippa from the association? She did not fear for Philippa, but she feared her mother's disapprobation.

On the landing outside her room Billy was looking over the balusters, holding his little tray of figures as he waited for her. He was slightly flushed and she guessed, so absorbed had he been in his creations, that the little scene in the drawing-room had passed over his head. He might still be unaware of any special significance in the name of Mrs. Brandon.

'Well, darling,' she said. Billy was her stay and consolation, yet she was sometimes aware of a slight, a very slight impatience with his single-mindedness. He was only thinking of his figures now.

'You see — they're historical heads, Mummie,' he said, 'and the animals that went with them. — That's an Anglo-Saxon and that's a monk from Iona, and that's a Viking. There were bears in Britain then, you know, and I mean that for a bear,

though I'm afraid it looks more like a pig; — you *could* tell it, couldn't you? — Only I *can't* make the wings go right on the Viking's helmet.' He was tired and troubled.

'Make the ears smaller — then it would be more like a bear,' she suggested. 'Bears have very small ears, you know. And your Viking's wings should slope more backwards, I think.' She, too, was tired and troubled. She suddenly felt unable to take any interest in Billy's animals. 'How clever, darling,' she murmured, seeking refuge from her own indifference.

Billy was swift to feel the note of convention. 'But you see' — he had set the tray down on a settle outside her door — 'I try and try — and they're so small — and they come off — and I *can't* get them right.' The Viking's left wing fell off as he spoke. 'Now he looks like a lop-eared rabbit!' cried Billy, almost in tears. 'Philippa said he was like a rabbit. She and Daddy laughed at him dreadfully.' That was why Billy had come upstairs.

'They're so small that it's very difficult, but it's a charming idea, and you'll never forget the Vikings and the monks. — Don't be discouraged, darling; — you've been at them for too long, that's all. — And you are going to do badgers, I suppose, and

otters, and lynxes — all sorts of animals. — Go on to the nursery now and put them away for the night.'

'Were there lynxes in Britain?' Billy fixed his large spectacled eyes upon her. 'It'll be very difficult to make a badger different from an otter. — I'm not sure that I can think of the difference, can you?'

'Well — you can look in a book,' said Beth, going into her room — but Billy followed her, carrying his tray. 'We'll go to the Zoo and look at them.'

'But I specially wanted *not* to look. I specially wanted to do them out of my head,' he urged. 'Badgers have much longer faces, haven't they? — And were there lynxes in Britain?'

'Doesn't your book tell you?' Beth took off her dress and put on her dressing-gown — wishing he would go.

'I don't remember anything about lynxes. Aren't they like large cats?'

'Yes. I think so. — Not on the eiderdown, darling; don't put your tray there; it might spot it.'

'The Romans had pet cats, hadn't they? — But I need only do the wild animals. Pet cats wouldn't count.' Billy had set his tray on a corner of the wash-hand-stand and was gazing perplexedly at it.

'It would be very difficult to make cats and lynxes different, I'm afraid.

'Wild animals only, I think. And you can't do them all at once. You'll think them out little by little.'

'But I do *so* want to think them out now,' Billy murmured, all a child's pertinacity in his gaze and voice. 'I don't feel I can go to sleep unless I think them out now. If I could only see them in my mind, I could go to sleep.'

'Well, darling — I really don't know. — If you won't look in a book. — I don't see them myself, you know. — And if I did, if I could show them to you, that *would* be like a book.' Beth was getting out her evening things and her cheeks were suddenly burning. She felt like a child herself; harassed and weary. She wished so much that poor little Billy would go.

'No: it wouldn't be like a book. It would all be in our minds. — That's what I want, you see; just in our minds; together. If you could just describe a lynx to me — as it comes to you, Mummie ——' and from the tray Billy cast a glance of sad entreaty.

'It *doesn't* come to me, darling. It doesn't come at all. Now I must dress, Billy. Run on, dear.

We'll think about them to-morrow. It's such a splendid plan.'

'Haven't they whiskers?'

'Yes. Perhaps. Yes — long whiskers, certainly. — "Bearded like a lynx."'

'Like a *pard*, Mummie.'

'Like a pard. Oh, yes.'

'What are pards?'

'A sort of tiger, surely.' Beth drew on her evening stockings. 'Or wild cat.'

'Were there pards in England?'

'I don't know, Billy.' Her tone had dropped to direst dullness. She could not help herself. She moved to the wash-hand-stand and poured out the hot water. Billy picked up his tray and, not seeing him, turning incautiously, she knocked against it and down to the ground fell monks, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, and bears. 'Oh! Billy! Oh, darling! I'm *too* sorry!' Tears sprang to her eyes.

Billy did not cry. Gentle in calamity he stooped and picked up, one by one, the flawed flora and fauna.

'Are they all spoiled, dear?' She knelt beside him.

'A little spoiled, I'm afraid, Mummie. Never mind. I can do them again.'

'I'm *so* sorry, Billy.' Yes. There had been hastiness, impatience in her mind, if none had been intended in her movement. She could have wept openly. The poor Viking had now lost both his wings. The monk was not distinguishable from the Anglo-Saxon. 'Darling — we'll sit together to-morrow and talk about them while you do them again. See — this isn't really hurt.'

Billy took the bear and set it in its place. It looked indeed more like a pig than ever. 'There were swine in Britain, you know,' said Beth, and she repressed a wish to laugh hysterically.

'I'll make it into a swine, and try to do a better bear to-morrow,' said Billy, and she felt that she adored him as, after she had kissed him, he went out carrying his tray.

She was sitting at her dressing-table when Aldous came in. Over her shoulder in the glass she saw his narrow face, its tossed hair, its blue eyes, its smile. It was not for her, that smile; it included but passed beyond her, dwelling on another object. He hesitated for a moment, then meeting her eyes in the glass, came over and put his hands on her shoulders. 'I'm so glad you liked her. — From your saying nothing, I was afraid, when I met you, that you didn't.'

In the mirror she smiled up at him. It was a

smile unknown to her till then; an ambiguous smile; a female smile: it gained time. She could not have trusted herself to speak.

Aldous went into his dressing-room, leaving the door open.

'Are you dining with her on Friday night?' she asked, in a voice that matched her smile, female in that he, in his male fatuity of absorption, would detect nothing amiss in it. He had said 'her' and so did she: there was only one 'her' now.

'No; not dining,' his voice, all confidence, replied. 'But I promised to go in after dinner and read with her.'

'Dante?'

'Yes. Dante. Did I tell you?'

'No. She told me. How far have you got?'

'Well, only half through the "Purgatorio."' Many absences were indeed now explained. Aldous perhaps felt the unexpressed comment. From his room his trusting voice went on: 'You see, as I told you, old Chantry asked me to keep an eye on her. He's worried still and she's very lonely.'

'Friends of hers came in while I was there. They all seemed to lead a very busy life. She didn't sound lonely. — Couldn't you put off the reading till another evening? I could telephone at once to Mother.

She'll be disappointed. She specially wanted you and Sir Maurice to meet.'

'I don't think that I could very well. It's just her evenings that get filled. She hates all that bustle — but her only life is in the evenings. She's not strong — as you probably saw too well — and hardly gets up till noon; and that crowds things. — Beth' — all trust and fatuousness to her cruelly sharpened eye, he came in, tying his cravat — 'It will be all right now, won't it, for Philippa to come down to Rest Harrow with me — on Saturday fortnight let us say? She was so disappointed at not having the child before. She's eager to meet her.'

Beth's braids were coiled and in their place. She sat looking at herself in the mirror, her hands fallen in her lap, and her own face was strange to her, carved as if from some pallid stone in which her eyes shone ominously. 'That was all it meant, wasn't it?' she said.

'All what meant?'

'My going to her to-day: her coming here — if she does come: your telling me about her at all. You'd never have told me about her, perhaps, if it hadn't been for Philippa.' Strange words. Astonishing herself. Shaken by them as if by sudden pistol-shots, she sat rigidly.

'What do you mean, Beth?' He was all amazement. So well had she protected him from her mother that she had protected him from himself, and even as she sat there, aware of a parting of the ways, she knew that he might still believe it a friendship if she could still pretend she felt it one. Was it the falling of Billy's tray that had thus broken down her barriers? She was powerless against the released waters of grief, panic, and indignation.

'She never thinks of asking me,' she said, and she knew that she was hating Mrs. Brandon. 'She knows that isn't necessary. She knows quite well that only Philippa is necessary. The other night you only told me about her so that I should appease Philippa. You are grateful to me now because I make things possible with Philippa. You've been seeing her for months — ever since last winter — and never told me she existed; — till this; when you had to; to get Philippa; to have her and Philippa together.'

'I don't understand you,' said Aldous after a moment. All the guileless trust was gone; — as if he, too, were shot. He was cold and watchful. He protected his treasure. He measured her — his antagonist — with a careful eye. — 'What do you mean? I told you that I'd met her when I first went down

there, last winter, when you were in Switzerland. If you've not met till now, it's merely because she's usually in the country, and very delicate, and seeing hardly anybody when in town. She feels me a friend. She trusts me. Do you mean to say you resent our friendship?'

'Do you think Mother would consider it a friendship — if she knew the facts?'

'Your mother? Why should I care what she thinks?'

'Do you care for what Philippa thinks? She's only a child — but she understands already. — You're safe with Philippa only because I make you so. When I said downstairs just now that I found Mrs. Brandon charming, I said it to protect you: before Mother: before Philippa. I find her anything but charming, and — yes, I resent a hidden friendship that shuts me out.'

She had not turned her head and it was still in the mirror that his gaze, arctic now, met hers. He looked at her for a moment, flashing an icy scorn upon her, then, laughing shortly, muttering some half-heard words — 'Protect! — Safe!' — he turned and left the room and she heard him running swiftly down the stairs.

'He is in love with her,' said Beth, looking at her-

self. 'He has forgotten me — and I have become a viper.' Yes. She had felt herself a viper, seeking a vulnerable spot in which to set its fangs. It was the viper he had seen in her. 'But it is the truth,' she murmured, still sitting on, with fallen hands that seemed to hang on her heart like the pendulum of a clock run down. And Philippa, dinner, awaited her below. She must go down and face him and Philippa. She must still protect him, and herself, from Philippa; for the picture of unity must at all costs be kept up. Tears were far away, inconceivable things. She could have shed tears for Billy's spoiled Vikings, but not for this disaster. Her eyes were dry — dry as a viper's eyes. The hateful simile clung to her as she went slowly downstairs, upheld by her necessity. Yes; she could face them both.

CHAPTER VII

BUT in the night Beth awoke to another reality. She had been upheld all through the evening, disconcerting Aldous, as she felt, by her firmness, cheerfulness, and resource. The flame of hatred and fear that burned within her seemed an intoxicant, filling her veins with specious but sufficient strength, and it was she who throughout the dinner initiated talk, addressing herself to Philippa rather than to Aldous, and who afterwards suggested bezique for them, so that she was free to go to her bureau and write letters enclosing programmes for a charity concert. Her thoughts, she felt, as she turned the phrases of sober appeal, would have terrified the poor babes on whose behalf she wrote, could they have been made visible — grimacing *chimères* rather than guardian angels; and the discrepancy worked like a disintegrating chemical within her, turning the intoxicant to poison, so that when Philippa's bedtime came and she rose, too, murmuring that she was sleepy, Philippa, glancing at her face, said: 'And frightfully tired, as well.'

She went out with the child, aware of a certain

awkwardness in Aldous's gesture as he turned, feigning indifference, and picked up the evening paper.

'Frightfully tired,' Philippa repeated, following her up the stairs. 'Is it those gruesome babies again, Mummie? Why *can't* they be controlled? — If only they were controlled, everything would be so simple; overcrowding, and slums, and everything. — I always think of the cat with the kittens in the barrel — do you remember, Mummie? — and how the little girl said: Is she going to fill the barrel? — If the barrel's filled, they *can't* be comfortable, however much you strain and strive for them. — Why don't you let them all die off, Mummie?'

'They wouldn't die off; they'd get tuberculosis and rickets and give even more trouble.'

'Then the only way is to control them.' This solution had recently come under Philippa's notice. — 'I believe in it — don't you, Mummie? — for all the ones who have to be taken care of by other people. — It doesn't do *anyone* any harm, does it? Will you explain it all to me sometime? — because I never *quite* understand. — Even if you're not married they seem to come.'

'I don't know that I quite understand either; but sometime, yes; — when you get married, perhaps.'

Beth spoke wanly, though at any other moment she might have been touched to inner mirth. 'You won't want to control yours. You will be able to take care of them.'

'Not of many. Not to be able to send them to Eton and get them presented — unless I marry somebody very rich. — However — I mean to do *that!* — Oh, Mummie — you are most *frightfully* tired!' They were on the landing outside Beth's door and the electric light shone full on her face. 'Your eyes are all *poached* with tiredness — and I believe it's Mrs. Brandon rather than the uncontrolled babies! — Charming people can be very tiring — as we all know — and I expect *she'd* have got rickets and tuberculosis and died off very young if her people hadn't been rich — and I shouldn't have minded much — whatever you may say! — No! I promise to be as good as gold! — Only do tell me what the other people were dressed in — and were there many of them? And does she always go on mourning for the one she did love and the one she didn't?' And the naughty, sparkling little face tilted toward Beth to receive a good-night kiss.

'You're not good; — you're bad,' said Beth, passing an arm around her neck and kissing her briefly; 'and you are not going to inveigle me into

talk when my eyes are poached with tiredness, I can promise you! — To-morrow you shall hear all about the dresses — there was only one beside Mrs. Brandon's. — It was very smart and short; — and they are shorter than ever in the evening in Paris.' — A sudden feeling of nausea almost overcame her. — 'Good-night, darling.' — She slipped swiftly into her room and shut the door.

But once she had stretched herself out upon her bed all hope of sleep deserted her. Her blood seemed shaken to a froth of expectancy, yet it was in a staring, stiffened rigour that she lay there, seeing shapes of disaster pass before her, feeling abyss upon abyss fall within, and at eleven Aldous came up and went into his dressing-room, and then entered and laid himself down in the bed beside hers, so that she stilled her breath, desperately waiting, desperately hoping. But he uttered never a word; nor did she. Hideously they had lain there in the bitter silence and soon he slept, or feigned to sleep. Then, overcome by her deadly weariness, she too fell asleep.

When she woke it was past three and all was still. It was first the stillness of London that she felt, the hushed great waters of an estuary in which the tide stood motionless: then of the room, a deeper pool of

quiet, faintly lighted from the street, the window curtains softly flapping against spaces of soft, starry sky; then the stillness of her own heart. Still and calm it lay within her, holding all quiet, holding all depth, and from its centre her soul seemed to float out to a circle's shining orbit and to look down at the spectacle of her and Aldous lying there, sad little human forms, as transitory in their piteous mould as Billy's clay figures, yet incarnating this transcendence where all was harmony and peace. Aldous really slept now, the sleep of deep exhaustion, and listening to his trustful breath, she saw him — like Billy, like herself — a child, a longing child, perplexed and hurt. How cruel she had been to him! He had come up to her full of trust and gratitude and she had destroyed his happiness. She saw his eyes as he had laid his hands on her shoulders and saw her own stony face. Why had she been cruel? Why had she struck Aldous from her because he loved some one else? How could one help loving? It was only the craving child, putting out its hands to beauty. In all the world, as she saw it from this stillness, there was but one guilt and that was the destroying of happiness. If he had wrecked hers, it was unconsciously; her crime had been conscious; for he was her love; she was at one

with him; and any sword thrust at him must pass first, with the full breadth of the blade, through her own body. And suddenly she rose up and knelt beside him, stretching her hands over him and murmuring 'Aldous.'

He woke at once; he had no time to remember anything but their unity. His hands met hers and held her, and he whispered: 'What is it, Beth?'

'I'm sorry. I was horrible. Forgive me. — Of course Philippa shall go.'

For an instant he was still; she saw his shadowy face looking at her, shadowy, yet so infused with the intentness of its gaze that lips and brows and eyes seemed to shine from the darkness as the circle had shone, not as shapes but as significances. They met as if after furthest alienation, and had they ever been so near? Then he put his arm around her and drew her beside him: 'My darling Beth,' he said. And as she heard him and felt his tenderness, as her head found its old place on his shoulder, the circle contracted to its throbbing human centre; she was her dual self again, again the craving, comforted child, and she broke into sobs, saying again: 'Forgive me.'

'There's nothing to forgive!' Aldous spoke almost fiercely — dear human warmth; it wrapped

round her: 'Of course it hurts you. — Of course I understand. I see now' — tenderly he held her, but he was thinking with passionate intensity — 'that I have been cowardly. I mean, Beth, I should have shared it all, from the first.'

'Yes,' she whispered; 'but if you had, I should probably have been horrible; — I should probably have been hurt and horrible and spoiled it for you.'

'That's why I shrank. — I cared so much that I was afraid lest, if I told you how much, you wouldn't understand. — It's you who must forgive me; — but I promise you, Beth, that I know of no wrong to you.' Passionately he was thinking and his voice faltered, finding the difficult sincerity.

'No; no wrong.' She wept softly now. 'You can't help loving her' — How his truth pierced her, how the throbbing human centre bled to hear his truth, but the radiance of the encompassing circle still illumined her; still she saw, through all the pain, how peace was to be attained. — To hold the radiance at the centre till blood was transfused to light; that was the secret of the incarnation. — 'It's a different love,' she said. 'You love me, of course you love me, darling Aldous; — but you're not in love with me any longer.'

She said it; she did not question or appeal and,

accepting her truth, holding her closely, he trusted her and blood flowed into light as she accepted that trust and heard him say: 'Yes: different. — One can't stay in love, can one? But you are my own dear wife.'

'One can,' she thought. It was the pierced heart that spoke. 'If one is a woman, one can.' But she did not say the words. She was his own dear wife. And old mysteries were in her mind as she lay and rested against him with eyes closed on their tears. 'Die to live.' Only by such acceptance could she keep this piercing, this heavenly nearness.

PART II

CHAPTER I

IF DADDY *wants* to be alone with her — *I* shan't stop him!' thought Philippa cantering in the late sunlight over the Downs after her father and Mrs. Brandon. She had dropped purposely behind, for, though he had given no sign of wishing to be alone with his friend, she suspected him of concealment almost as much as she suspected her. Mrs. Brandon did not ride well. She crouched a little on her side-saddle and when she trotted tended to bump. 'And I wish she'd fall off and break her neck,' Philippa reflected, calmly and, as it were, without animosity. She was not conscious of feeling animosity towards Mrs. Brandon. Just as something in her attracted her father, so something in her attracted Philippa; her bitter-sweet softness, her indolent gloom. She was a fairy-tale sort of person; — was it in a dream or a fairy-tale that one had stooped in the night under thick blossoming branches, thick red flowers — too soft in scent to be spicy — and felt one's senses drugged by the heavy aromatic sweetness? No stars. 'No; — not a star shows through the branches. — But Daddy thinks he sees them. —

He's always looking for them,' said Philippa to herself, riding more slowly, 'only they're not there. — What he thinks are stars are only glow-worms. — That's what she's like, red flowers in the dark and glow-worms. — And I do wish she'd fall off and break her neck,' Philippa repeated, pleasing herself with the contrast between her own coolness and the savagery of the thought. For if she felt Mrs. Brandon's allurement, she resisted it; coolly for herself; savagely for her father.

How far away they had already gone! How fast they were cantering! How queer it was that Mummie had been so willing to let her come for this week-end when she had been so unwilling the first time. 'It's just because she wants to play up and please Daddy,' thought Philippa; and the memory of her mother's eyes, yesterday afternoon, bidding them good-bye, hurt her so much that she turned from it — and — well, if they went as fast as that, she would go slow; they seemed to have forgotten all about her; Mrs. Brandon was carrying him off in that wild gallop; — she ahead, he pursuing; — and Philippa drew hard at her rein, gazing at the distant figures rounding a velvety shoulder of the Downs. Yes; Mrs. Brandon made Daddy forget her. They disappeared with never a backward

glance, taking her docility for granted. She sat motionless now on her horse. Daddy might still miss her and come back. If he did, she would forgive him. If he didn't; if he could really forget... Sitting there between sky and turf, the world all fallen to azure distances, it was anger she summoned, but fear that came. For though she looked and looked, and waited, for how long, there was nothing; only the stillness between sky and turf; and in the stillness it seemed to Philippa that she heard, as if within an empty house, the furtive footfalls of fear, stepping softly about within her. Could fathers ever really forget their children?

The gentle head of her horse drew her eyes. He stood so quietly, his warm strong sides breathing softly under her thighs and legs, his ears pricked and veering first to one side, thoughtfully, then to the other, as if he, too, were questioning the situation. As she had turned her thoughts from the memory of her mother's face, so she turned them now from the footfalls of fear, stooping forward to pat Robin's neck, and murmuring: 'What a darling!' What darlings they all were, all animals! Chuffie, and Richard, their dear Sealyham who had died, and Robin. 'I love them far, far best,' she thought determinedly. 'They're really much pret-

tier than we are, too. Daddy is really rather a scraggly person and looks awfully funny in his bathing-suit, with his legs all fuzzy — I do think it's ridiculous to have fuzzy legs — and his knees rather knobbed and his collar-bones showing too much. — I don't believe she'd admire him in a bathing-suit,' thought Philippa, smiling bitterly, 'or he her for that matter! What gruesome sights the women are in the illustrated papers, snapped on the Lido or Riviera; — *just* wrong, everywhere; and thinking themselves *too* charming! I do think naked people are ridiculous! While a naked horse is right, every bit of him!' and Philippa turned Robin's head and began to canter downwards in a direction opposite to the one in which her father and Mrs. Brandon had disappeared.

On and on, and a little faster and faster she went. — There was the grassy road from which, half an hour ago, they had ascended from Rest Harrow. The woods below were a purple mist spangled by fountains of green and threaded with lines of white birches. Above them rooks cawed slowly and wheeled against the sky and in a field a man was ploughing and the horses cast shadows over the dark earth. She saw it all as she flew, loving it all, the excitement, first of the game, warming to a

growing sense of reality and vengeance. Now she had rounded a headland of the Downs and the Rest Harrow country with its woods and fields lay far behind her. The scattered houses of a little town warned her not to descend too low; there were ugly roads, bricks, slates, telegraph poles, and petrol pumps defacing loveliness and giving a further edge to her deep resentment. Horrid human beings; spoiling everything; let her escape them, her and Robin. How lovely to grow into a horse and escape for ever and gallop for ever, like this, on and on, vengeance and delight singing in one's ears! She had mounted another shoulder, trotted down into the purple shadow of a steep cleft, and climbed a stony track that led out to a summit where, panting, her cheeks flushed, she drew rein and saw a wide horizon spreading round, melting on her left to the impalpable brooding blue of the sea. A pair of plovers cried and tumbled in the sky. The wind sang shrilly yet softly. 'And now I am really lost,' she thought. 'Really and truly lost. I haven't an idea how to get back to Rest Harrow.' And tears suddenly sprang to her eyes.

A little copse in a hollow facing south was before her and she trotted slowly to it. She was feeling tired and, dismounting, she tied Robin to the branch

of a thorn-tree and lay down on the warm turf in the hollow, fixing her eyes on the sea. The far, wild, plunging cry of the plovers sounded over her head and she watched the birds alighting near her with upstretched wings, running forward and falling to a meditative stillness. In the air they were sharp and vivid, black and white, but on the ground they became almost invisible, like fish in a stream, the iridescent green of the back, the silvery white of the breast melting into the colours of the turf. She looked at them for a little while and closed her eyes. How still it was, lying here; but when one saw the world no longer, one heard sounds till then unnoticed — the distant tinkle of a sheep bell, the hum of a bee poising on the flowers near by. It was strange to think that she would be forgotten some day and lie stretched out like this with a marble face like Christopher's. It would have been impossible to imagine, if she had not seen Christopher; but he, too, would be forgotten, as they all would, father, mother, Billy, and herself; and as she thought it a cold horror stole into her hot young heart and she seemed to herself stiffened to the shape in which, unmoving, she would lie for eternity. Why had Daddy forgotten her for this stranger? Why had he been willing that she should

be lost when the time they had to be together was so short? The cold horror passed into a tumult of grief and already the tears were falling down her cheeks, when she felt a touch, too soft to startle, descend upon her face and saw Robin's questioning muzzle caressing and breathing over her. Never was anything so soft as this living velvet. She put up her arms to the great head and looked into the great innocent eyes; they looked almost as big as the sky, mysterious with comprehending love. Robin, too, had felt lonely and had needed to draw near. She laid her cheek against the pulsing nostrils and felt her sorrow softly exorcised. No, holding Robin like this, it was not what it had seemed. If one stretched out stiffly, death was all one could feel; but if one held Robin, one felt life and knew that while it was here it was lovely; even vengeance and anger were lovely; only she did not feel so angry now; she felt, indeed, a little ashamed of herself and a little sorry for poor old Daddy who would, by this time, be quite frantic. 'And serve him right,' Philippa asserted, kissing Robin, 'but he's had enough of it now and we must really try to find our way back, mustn't we? Perhaps you can help, you old angel. You must be getting hungry too.' Heavens, how hungry she was! This was her thought as she

turned Robin's head and trotted slowly back. They had had an early tea, to profit by the long late afternoon of 'summer time,' and now that she had begun to descend the northern slope, the shadow enveloped her. She would not like to pass the night up here wandering about the Downs, but it would be a wretched fiasco if she must stop in some little town and beg accommodation for the night. Miles and miles she had still to go, and, trotting on and on, searching for landmarks that would guide her to the stony track, a thrill of dismal satisfaction mingled with her hunger; for to reach Rest Harrow at midnight, almost dead, would be vengeance indeed.

She found the stony track, descended it, climbed to the next Down and the next, and then rode doggedly, while the sun sank into a bank of cloud above the sea. And then, far away, she saw on the paling sky the dark tiny figure of a horseman approaching her. It was Daddy, of course, and he had been looking for her all this while. He had for many an hour given no thought to Mrs. Brandon. Philippa was sure of that, as she hastened Robin's pace and braced herself to swiftness. It was too far for cry or gesture; but he must see her as she saw him; and it came to her, as they thus approached each other, that it would be like this in heaven, like this

that in heaven people who loved each other would, after long parting, find each other; — small, hardly seen at first; coming nearer and nearer, more and more clearly remembered while all griefs and enmities dispersed in yearning gladness. She and Daddy loved like that. Nothing could ever come between them; not death; and how much less Mrs. Brandon with her ink-blot eyes.

Now she heard his cry, wild and far, and the distance seemed to thin and curve it like a plover's. They were galloping towards each other, and already she felt the fixity of his gaze and saw how the hours of search had sharpened his features. High, remote, accusing, his face looked to her against the sky, his grey locks flying backward, and never had she seen her father look so beautiful; never before had she felt herself in awe of him; and feeling that awe, a sense of passionate self-protection rose within her. She had done nothing; she had only dropped behind; she was not guilty; while they had gone so fast and forgotten her; and she was terribly tired; so tired that she leaned forward on her saddle as her father approached her and let her hands sink to the pommel and her eyes close.

'Philippa!' he said. He laid his hand on her arm and drew rein beside her. 'Philippa!' Was it in

deep reproach or passionate relief? She did not know and, looking up at him, murmured: 'Oh, Daddy, where did you go? — I looked and looked and then I got quite lost.'

Her father had dismounted and put his arms round her and she slid down into their circle. He held her for a moment, her head against his shoulder, and she felt his lips pressed on her brows and knew again shame muffled by her fatigue.

'Sit down here, darling. I've brought some food for you,' he said. He spread his coat on the turf, holding the horse's reins on his arm. 'A little brandy first, Philippa.'

'Oh, Daddy, I hate it.'

'Only one swallow, darling. — Here's milk and sandwiches.' He sat down beside her and watched her eat. Never was there a father like him. His blue eyes with their winglike brows were bent on her; the breeze lifted his hair, and, as the soft fire spread through her from the brandy, an impulse rose within her: — 'Tell him all. — Your head on his shoulder. — Tell him all, and ask to be forgiven.'

'Cosima thought of the sandwiches,' he said, watching her eat. 'I'm afraid I was too distressed. — I don't know what's become of her. She's been looking all afternoon, too.'

'Cosima.' He called her Cosima. Until then he had always said Mrs. Brandon. When he was alone with her, he called her Cosima and now the name slipped out. Philippa munched on at her sandwiches and fixed vague eyes before her. 'I wish you could have brought something for darling Robin, too,' she said. 'He's frightfully hungry.'

'He's of a frame better able to bear it than yours,' her father smiled tremulously. 'There. Do you feel a little revived? How could it have happened, Phil? We looked back — and you weren't there.'

'I followed and followed for ever so long, but you went so fast that I couldn't keep up.'

'We thought at first you'd gone back to Rest Harrow.'

'I didn't think of going back. I went on looking for you, and I suppose when you were down there I must have missed you — once one gets up here it's so confusing. I was lost, Daddy. I've come from miles away.'

The reason he believed her so implicitly, questioning no further, the reason he kept those startled eyes on her, was because *he* was feeling guilty. Yes, he and his Cosima had had the fright she intended. That was good. She regretted nothing. She had made Daddy love her more than ever. She drank

the milk and finished the last sandwich and said she could perfectly ride on now.

The pale sky arched over them, deepening its evening purple to a sad rose-colour above the sea. The Downs were dark and the country veiled with mist. Philippa and her father trotted for some time in silence. 'I wish we owned horses, Daddy,' she said. 'I wish Robin were mine.'

'I wish he were,' said her father absently. 'If I could make more money he should be.'

'Haven't you that rich old uncle in Italy, Daddy? Won't he give you money, perhaps, when he gets too old to care for it?'

'People never get too old to care for it,' her father smiled, but he was absent, his eyes fixed before him. 'You can ride Robin whenever you come down here, you see,' he said. 'Mrs. Brandon wants you to come as often as you can.'

'What does she want with three horses? She must be very rich.'

'She hasn't three; this one of mine is hired; on your account. She hunts Robin and Deirdre.'

'I shouldn't think she was strong enough to hunt, Daddy. She looks very delicate, doesn't she — a sort of Pink Pills for Pale People look — as if she ought to have tonics, you know.'

'She's not much of a huntress, I fancy, but likes following the hounds. She looks like that because she's had a great deal of trouble.'

'Yes, I know. Mummie told me. Mummie's awfully sorry for her. Did Mummie ever ride when she was young?'

'A little, I think; in the country.'

'Wouldn't she like to come with us to Richmond Park?'

'I hardly think so. She hasn't time, has she?'

'All the housekeeping and our clothes and committees and things. I'm sure the committees give her headaches. And I'm sure she's given the hardest work to do. *They* receive the duchess and she writes the envelopes. She'd look awfully nice on a horse, wouldn't she: on a brown horse in a brown habit. Do you like working every day and all day at that dull Board of Education, Daddy? You don't look like an educational person. You look like a poet.'

'Well, I'm not a poet. It's fortunate for me that I'm not, and for you all. Though I should like to have spent my life differently; — measured atoms and weighed stardust: — it's science I care for.'

'I'll marry a duke some day, Daddy, and then you can study up the atoms and stardust as much

as you like. As to atoms, I believe *I'm* much more intricate — and you have me to study now!' And Philippa cast him a sidelong glance from between her lashes.

'Yes. I have you,' he smiled back; 'and mathematics certainly won't solve you, Philippa.'

Her father knew a way home far shorter than her roundabout Odyssey. They had not ridden for an hour when they saw the lights of Rest Harrow shining below them among its woods, and, as they trotted down the little avenue of birches, Philippa recognised the short but stalwart form of Mr. Chantry walking up and down before the porch. Over his massive hair he wore a broad Carlylean hat tipped a little on one side, and even in its shade Philippa could see how cold was the scrutiny of his brilliant eyes. 'Horrid old man!' she thought. '*He* won't believe me!'

'Well — well — well!' Mr. Chantry uttered in a deep ringing voice. 'Your truant found. — Tell Mrs. Brandon' — he said to a maid, over his shoulder. 'She's quite worn out; quite knocked up with all this worry. I told her there wasn't the slightest need for any anxiety.' — While Aldous dismounted Mr. Chantry stood in the porch, not advancing to help his young guest. — 'But she took

it very much to heart. It's not good for her, of course. — We've none of us had any dinner.'

'I'm afraid there was a great deal of cause for anxiety,' said Aldous, holding out his arms to his child, and Philippa slid wearily down into them. 'We rode too fast and she lost us.'

'Too fast?' Mr. Chantry was smiling upon Philippa now and she disliked his smile. 'Why, this young Hebe could outstrip you both. Well, young lady, you look none the worse for your adventure. — What were you up to, my pretty maid? Watching birds? — Ah, my poor Cosima. — Here they are; just as I told you; there was no need whatever for agonising as you did.'

They were in the hall, and down the winding staircase Mrs. Brandon was floating surrounded by an aura of transparent black. Her face was white, her eyes haggard, she pressed her hands together on her breast. — 'Oh, Philippa,' she murmured, floating onward with eyes only for her young guest — 'How *could* you! Was it all our fault?'

'She's been having a lovely hot bath with scents in it,' Philippa thought as the moonbeam arms encircled her. 'And she's frightfully angry with Daddy and won't look at him — I do believe they've quarrelled.'

'No; it must have been my fault,' she asserted. 'I must have been too stupid.' She had taken off her soft riding-hat and stood there in her coat and breeches, her long hair tied behind with a bow, like a very young cavalier. She saw the picture she made and the warmth and soft excitement surrounded her after the dark and loneliness. And like the young cavalier she would be magnanimous. Old Mr. Chantry, for all his vexation on his child's account, was observing her, admiring her, leaning in his indolent vigour against the great stone fireplace, and she cast him a cool glance as she said: 'It must have been my fault. I ought to have followed more carefully. I got muddled and turned round and I *was* watching birds. — There were such lovely plovers up there.'

CHAPTER II

COSIMA BRANDON woke suddenly in her fresh scented room seeing, in a dream, a stare fixed upon her. She had fallen asleep in great exhaustion and known, as oblivion took her, that sleep was the only escape from her new fear. Jack was the old fear, the memory of his face and what she had done to it; the new was the memory of Aldous's face that afternoon on the Downs, when they could not find the child; — but this sense of menace, even of horror, that encircled her, was formless; a globe of darkness pierced by a gaze, angelic or satanic, reaching out from a star to touch her shrinking flesh. She turned on the light beside her bed and raised herself on her elbow to look at her clock: — only two — and lifted a book from beside the light. Three were piled there in readiness for insomnia, and the little box of cachets; — 'Religio Medici,' 'Du Côté de chez Swann,' and the 'Divina Commedia' given her by Aldous. Horror belonged to nightmare; nightmare could be exorcised — if fear could not be, and already the formless menace grew fainter, though, as she turned the pages of the Dante, brood-

ing tenderly for a moment on the delicate undergraduate signature crossing the fly-leaf, her startled mind was busy with the sources of such a dream and found them in the moment of perplexity and distress with which, the evening before, she had first seen Philippa. The child's face reminded her of something, but of what she could not tell; the memory was embodied in a stare, a queer prolonged chameleon-like stare — 'the grin without the cat,' she thought, turning the leaves of the Dante; 'but it's as if I'd seen her before; and in that very same blue coat.' And perhaps it was because of the sense of groping and distress with which she had met his child, that the look of Aldous's face had so frightened her that afternoon when he had said — oh! with a cruel bitterness: 'You make me forget everything.' It had, then, been his gaze that returned in sleep to accuse and menace her.

Was it possible, after all she had lost, that she was to lose Aldous, too, because of the child? Or would the child be but the mere occasion of disaster? For it was always disaster and darkness that dogged her footsteps. Never did she put out her hand to take happiness (the simile returned to her) but a knife fell upon it and with a stroke severed it from its treasure. 'Yes, from the very beginning,' she mut-

tered, remembering childhood wrongs and bereavements; her mother's lightly commiserating eye, turned to her mirror — not really caring; her father's misplaced indulgences driving her to folly. How it had hurt Aldous, that simile, when she had used it to him. No lightness there; nor indulgence either. Never had she met in her tossed life anything like his love; — for it was love; the more passionate, she felt sure, for the loyalty that sealed his lips. — 'And now that I've seen his wife,' she thought, 'I know how ghastly it must be for him; tied to that little frump.' And, turning off the light, she stretched herself out on a long sigh in her silken garment and tethered her mind to her own physical well-being, telling over the well-worn rosary of her comfort; for comfort, beautiful comfort, was a refuge, and indeed to her not comfort at all unless beautiful; — and that was probably a dangerous pitch of civilisation to have reached, she thought — still guiding her mind away from fear; — since even in her father's artfully contrived house she was aware of fretful ironies, and was anything more irksome than an outmoded artfulness? Poor old father survived, in all his lushness, from the Pater period; still imagining himself to be burning with a pure gemlike flame among his fumed-oak photographs

from Rossetti, his stencilled Morris patterns and the girl-guides he hoped to kiss in the garden when he read poetry to them. And as a matter of fact he had never burned at all, not even in his frequent love-affairs, angry as they had made her mother; only smouldered and smoked along the ground; better for him if he hadn't married a rich wife; better for her, perhaps, not to have been left all the money; though she suspected that poverty might be even more suffocating than luxury; even more suffocating than the sense that often came upon her of a thick, sweet, custard-like consistency in life making one crave an aromatic sharpness.

How dark and pale, how cool and crisp and sharp had been the fruited branch of lemon-tree on the Italian sky! — 'Oh, no! Oh, God, no!' she muttered, pressing her hands down over her eyes, turning her face into her pillow; — for it was Jack's face that had returned; not as, leaning against his shoulder, she had seen it with the branch of lemon-tree behind it, but grey and stiff and coffined as she had never seen it, but had known that it had become, far away from her in India. Her mind, helplessly, crept down the torturing ruts of memory, tracing the steps that had parted them. It had not been her fault. Anyone might go to India and die there, and

it was better for him to have loved her — was it not? — than to have married that silly Pomfret girl, who had not cared for him really or how could she have married Harry Mainwaring and had already two babies — both ugly: — thank goodness they were not Jack's! But poor Jack: poor trusting, loving Jack. It was only Aldous who could still the gnawing of that grief; Aldous and his understanding love. Not once had he made love to her, and it had bewildered her at first; but that was why it had been so easy to deal with the flustered, frumpish little wife, who ought to be contented really with the loyalty and kindness she received and care of home and children. Philippa was not an atom like her and it was Philippa he adored. Yes: he adored his child, she had seen how much that afternoon in his haggard eyes: and had it not been in hate that he had looked at her that afternoon, saying: 'You make me forget everything'? Those words had not been a tribute; not even a protest; but a repudiation.

'I can't bear it,' Cosima whispered to herself. 'I can't bear it. If I lose him everything is over.' And, a sudden flame lighting her darkness, 'Why should I bear it?' she said. 'He's there and he must tell me why he looked like that. — That bitterness! To me!' she said, sliding out of bed, 'who have done

nothing, nothing except try to please him. — And if I was glad to see that he could forget her,' she thought, pushing back her hair before her mirror, scanning her sunken face, pressing the powder-puff here and there — '*he* was glad, too, not to have her there! — He wanted to be alone with me; and he thought she was following, just as I did. And she could have followed perfectly; it was all a lie; all planned — to frighten us!' And sitting there before the mirror she gazed at herself for a long moment hearing her bedside clock tick loudly and asking herself: 'Can I go?'

Suddenly, outside her door, Montague, the pug, gave a little bark. He slept there in his basket, for his snoring disturbed her, and as she heard the bark, the flame sprang up again within her: — 'Aldous!' she thought. 'He's come to his door! He wants me! He's unhappy, too, and wants to tell me so.' Monty was silent and, listening, she put out a trembling hand, took up her lipstick and reddened her lips, then tiptoed to the door and gently opened it and looked out. Monty's chin rested quietly on the edge of his basket and he raised his eyes to her and sleepily stirred his tail. His bark had frightened Aldous away lest it waken someone, and now full resolution was within her and she lifted Monty in

the basket, set him inside her room, closed the door softly, and sped down the passage.

The house was still. Everyone was sleeping; everyone but her and Aldous, and she tapped a thistledown tap at his door, expecting, with delicious fear, to have him open to her on the instant. But a silence followed her signal and as she leaned there and felt it flow over her she understood, with sick fear and humiliation, that she had been mistaken; that he was asleep and had not ventured forth.

'Why have I come? Why did I put on the powder? Shall I go back? He will despise me,' she thought; 'he will find me out.' But she could not go back; not now: — oh, no — she must see him now; — and she tapped again and heard swift, cautious movements and then his form was before her, dark against the open window, standing folded in its dressing-gown — and was it not austere, remote and menacing? 'But I only wanted comfort' — she thought, and she murmured, leaning against the door: — 'I'm frightened: — so frightened. — I thought I heard you — and I had to come.'

But he was not remote; not menacing; and he too was frightened. 'What is it?' he whispered. He put his hand on her arm and drew her in and closed the door; his hand leaned on it above her shoulder. She

was aware of his every breath and gesture; as he was aware of hers; and she was weeping now, but with delicious tears and said: 'I thought you were angry with me; this afternoon. — You looked at me so angrily. — I thought I was going to lose you.'

He was silent for a moment; not stirring. 'I wasn't angry with you; — only with myself. I was horribly anxious.'

'It wasn't our fault. — Was there any danger, really?'

'Beth had trusted her to me — and to you. I was thinking of that. Other things were behind it.'

'I know. I understand. But horrible thoughts come at two o'clock in the morning. — It seemed to me that I was to lose you, too. — It seemed to run forward — that look — as if it were our future; — all the beauty destroyed.'

'You know what you mean to me,' he said: his hand leaned above her. 'You know that you will never lose me. You know that I love you better than anything.'

In the dark room the sudden words were portentous; to them both. Both stood silent; listening to them. 'Thank you,' said Cosima faintly. 'Good-night.'

'Good-night,' he said. He did not ask her to stay.

'I am happy. — I am comforted,' she whispered, putting her hands on his shoulders, half-clinging, mothlike, half-holding him away.

His arms went round her then. 'I am not happy. I am not comforted,' he said.

It was he — he, who said the portentous things. She was there in his arms and he was hers. — But: 'Not now, not now,' she thought, even in the ecstasy of her triumph. — 'He would not forgive me — afterwards — because the child is here.' — And she drew away from him, whispering 'Good-night,' opening the door, escaping, knowing that he marvelled at, and adored her.

'Burn with a pure gemlike flame,' she thought; — a strange ironic lucidity amidst all the tumult of her heart.

CHAPTER III

BETH listened to Philippa's chatter. 'It's a rather tiresome little house, Mummie; awfully pretty, with a thatch going up in peaks and coming down, almost to the ground, and wrought-iron latches that pinch your fingers on the doors and windows, and a Greek text carved over the porch — don't you think it's rather silly to have things about love and friendship that hardly anyone can read over your porch? — and the hugest fireplace in the hall you ever saw with ingle-nooks inside among the flames so that you would get your toes burnt if you ever sat on them. I had a divine little early-morning tea-tray, everything with rosebuds on it, and the food was *delicious;* — *pêche Melba* for dinner; — real *pêche Melba*, not tinned pears and iced custard. I think they're both rather greedy, both Mrs. Brandon and her father; but it's rather nice staying with greedy people.' Philippa had come back from the station alone, Aldous having gone on to Whitehall, and still in coat and hat she sat opposite to her mother and brother, drawing her gloves through her hands and chattering with a sparkling and watchful blitheness.

'Why was the house tiresome?' asked Billy. Billy, when his attention was roused, was an admirable audience and it was perhaps Philippa's demeanour now that roused it rather than her theme; for he was not much interested in people and their habits unless they were Vikings and Anglo-Saxons. Beth could not find it in herself to ask any question. There was but one that held her mind and to feign a lesser curiosity was too difficult. What had Philippa thought of Mrs. Brandon? — under her assumed ease that was the burning preoccupation. She had not met Mrs. Brandon again, though, mercifully, Philippa did not know why. Mrs. Brandon had called, and Beth, just turning the corner of the street, had seen the sparkling car draw up under the hawthorn tree and had swiftly stepped back, hiding until the chauffeur had made his fruitless call and Mrs. Brandon, her card deposited, been safely driven away. She had been ashamed of the craven impulse, but she knew that the ordeal of meeting her was one for which she was not yet prepared.

'Why tiresome, if it's so pretty and everything's so nice?' asked Billy.

'Oh, I don't quite know,' said Philippa, pulling out the fingers of her gloves. — 'These wash beautifully, don't they, Mummie? I washed them in my

basin the afternoon I arrived. — It's all too cosy, somehow. It's his house, you know; old Mr. Chantry's, and hers would be quite different, I think. She does the garden for him — a perfectly marvellous garden with polyanthus and daffodils everywhere, up to the windows. — Daddy described Mr. Chantry, you know: — Plato in one pocket and an apple in the other; — only he's not like an apple, more like *pêche Melba!* I think he's rather horrid, to speak the truth; but I suppose he means well. — He has the thickest black eyebrows and eyelashes I ever saw; — like a marionette's — as if they were gummed on! And shiny black eyes — greedy eyes; — and gushes of white hair. He wishes he were tall; but he's not; and I was rather sorry for him in a way, because he dotes on Mrs. Brandon and admires everything she does and she doesn't admire him and that makes him rather uneasy ——' said Philippa, casting a bright glance upon her mother as though to gauge her appreciation of such insight.

Beth laughed. 'You make me see him!'

'I think you'd simply hate him, if you did see him, Mummie,' said Philippa, 'except that you're too kind to hate anyone. — But I mean that he'd make you feel all dull and crinkly; and that you didn't want to say a word while he was there. — He

has such a fat laugh — as though his throat were lined with batter! — We had a glorious ride' — Philippa had now rolled her gloves to a ball and was tossing it in the air. 'My horse was called Robin and was an angel and we went for miles. I was lost for a little while and watched a lot of birds — plovers and linnets. — It's lovely to see the plovers looping the loop in the air. — I ride far better than Mrs. Brandon does. She doesn't look a bit well on a horse really, and goes fast just to show she dares.'

'Did you get on with her, Phil? Did you like her?' Beth could not repress it now and it would be unnatural not to ask it. And she saw a look of caution drift across the care-free eyes and saw that Philippa took counsel with herself as she answered:

'She was perfectly sweet to me, Mummie. I quite see why you think her charming. She sat on the cushions in front of the fire on Saturday evening and read poetry aloud after dinner. She tilts her head first on one side when she reads and then on the other and sighs out the words at the ends of the lines, and it's rather pretty the way she twists her hand in and out of her pearls and runs it up behind her neck to loosen them. — Did you notice the way her mouth curls round her teeth when she smiles? It makes it a pretty funny shape' — Philippa tried

to mimic the shape. — 'Mine won't go; — it needs bigger, softer lips; — but it's as if she were starting to say: — "foo"; — "foo"; — while she smiled. — You see? — She read modern poetry; very odd and so mournful and snappish, as if the world had suddenly become quite different to what it's ever been before: — I don't believe it has, do you? — Daddy made fun of the poems a good deal. She didn't *really* quite understand what he meant, at first; and then she did, and her mouth curled up and made "foo!"'

'Did you get close enough to the plovers to see their crests?' asked Billy. 'They have heads like little princesses, in my book, with high crowns on, and they're a lovely green and blue.'

'Speaking of princesses' — said Philippa, ignoring Billy's question as she so often though not unkindly ignored his questions, 'has my dress come and will you sew on the stars this afternoon, Mummie? And oh! must I go to the dentist? There's absolutely nothing wrong with my teeth.'

'I think he'd better see them all the same; but something *is* wrong with one of mine, so I'll go today in your place. — The dress has come and looks lovely and I'll sew on the stars. — Plovers *are* like little princesses, Billy, with high crowns on.'

'They look like Mrs. Brandon, too,' said Philippa. 'I watched them for ever so long up on the Downs; when they run, they are more than ever like princesses, tilting forward with long trains. Not that Mrs. Brandon wears crowns or long trains either. But she's soft and glossy and glittering, and has such big soft eyes.'

Did Philippa still think she hated Mrs. Brandon, or had she been subjugated? Beth, watching the care-free yet careful little face, asked herself the question, and with it felt a sick suspicion of herself slide into her mind. What had Philippa said on that dreadful evening when she had confronted her father? — 'You know you'd like to have me cut her out.' Had this hope underlain her willingness to let the child go to Rest Harrow? She must not desecrate the memory of the heavenly acceptance, but her suspicion coiled like a curve of sickly smoke and, seeing those soft dark birdlike eyes, she knew that she had been afraid all the time. 'When I see Aldous I shall know,' she thought, going through the day, sewing on the stars, sitting in the painful dentist's chair and finding a relief in pain. 'Will he be so happy and so kind that he will make me happy again — keeping me near him in spite of everything?'

Yet Philippa had not been really happy. She had known that from the first glance at her face, and when Aldous came in that evening she knew, from the first glance at his, that he was terribly unhappy. It was strange to find, as she averted her eyes from the revelation, that his face, so strained, so fixed, so altered, interpreted Philippa's. They had been unhappy together; she was sure of that; and she saw them in the train journeying up to London that morning, sitting perhaps silent side by side in the railway carriage. No, Philippa did not love Mrs. Brandon, and it seemed to her now, as she and Aldous talked from bed to dressing-room — for they were dining out, he was late, and there was only time to dress — as she heard the thin acrid veil of fretfulness that strove to conceal some corroding preoccupation, that she would rather she had loved her, rather anything, than feel him so dislocated and estranged.

'Great success, the child,' he said, and he did not say a word of Mrs. Brandon. 'She was enchanting in her blue dress at dinner. Old Chantry has an eye for beauty and said she made him think of Millais's Ophelia. I know what he meant; the hair flowing out and the look of incredible youth and freshness. She rode quite beautifully; I wish we could afford

to have her painted on a horse before she's much older. — She got lost up on the Downs, did she tell you? and gave us rather a bad half-hour. — Where the devil is a clean white tie? — One can't be expected to dine out in a dirty tie.'

Beth got up from her dressing-table, her heart thumping in her side, and found a sheaf of clean ties. She still did not dare look at him; her eyes might helplessly betray him to himself if they met his. 'Yes; she told me. Was she gone long?' she asked. 'How did she manage to get lost?'

'She stopped to look at birds, I think, and let us go too far ahead. Did she say it was long? Did she seem put out about it?'

'Not at all put out. She made nothing of it. She seems to have enjoyed her visit immensely.'

They went down and rang for a taxi and drove to Kensington Square where the Wedderburns lived, old friends whom to see was to Beth always a pleasure. And on this evening, even with her thumping heart, she found herself almost forgetting, almost at ease, talking to Dick Irwin about Italy and Mantegna at dinner and to Margery Irwin and Marcia Wedderburn afterwards about the last book on the Brontës. But as they walked away — for the evening was mild — Aldous said: 'What a mountain of

human energy expended for what a mouse of enjoyment!'

'A mountain? Such a simple little dinner? There wasn't much energy expended, Aldous. That's why I like going there so much.' Beth spoke timidly, trying to keep her end up, and the Wedderburns' end.

'I call it an expenditure of energy to go to it and to come back.'

'Didn't you enjoy it?'

'Why should I enjoy hearing Mrs. Irwin tell me about Assisi or Frank's old jests over the wine? They are treadmill people, as we are, I suppose; rapidly going downhill to old-fogeydom.'

She walked beside him, holding her cloak closely around her, her head bent down. Remembering Mrs. Brandon's words of pity for his routine, it seemed to her suddenly that all their life together was a burden to him. It seemed to her, walking with bent head and feeling as if she held her heart, like a bleeding animal, pressed against her, that Aldous was disliking her. Must it not be always so, if a husband was in love with someone else? How could he not dislike the wife who stood between him and his love?

Philippa was, of course, long since in bed when

they got home. It was her custom, on such evenings, to have little jokes and greetings waiting for her father, a Limerick tucked into the pocket of his pyjamas, a paper monkey perched on his pincushion, a twist of chocolate peppermints — they both adored chocolate peppermints — laid on his pillow. To-night Beth saw that he looked for them; but there was nothing. He made no comment on the omission and undressed without speaking and came and lay down on his bed, saying only, in a curious voice, in which compunction mingled with finality and shut a door between them: 'Good-night, Beth. I'm rather overtired, I think.'

The next day, and the next — the last of the Easter holidays — were full. Beth, on the Wednesday afternoon, took the children to the Wedderburns' party, tea and dancing and the play, and Philippa, as princess, acted with exceeding ease and grace. It was late when she returned with them, thrilling still with their excitement, the traces of paint not yet effaced from Philippa's lips and eyes, and Billy, on the steps, said: 'Philippa did the best, don't you think, Mummie? She wasn't only dressed up and remembering; she was like a real princess and the prince wasn't nearly good enough for her.'

'Princes never are,' said Philippa with her dark-

ling brightness. 'Do people ever marry and live happily ever after, do you think, Mummie?'

'Yes; — if they're clever enough — or lucky enough,' said Beth, opening the door. 'As happy as they deserve to be, perhaps.'

In the hall Chuffie came forward to meet them, and Philippa swung him up and held him in both hands above her enwreathed head. Her black hair flowed from under the leaves and flowers over her shoulders, her arms and throat were white as milk; she was lovely; an incarnation of youth and careless power; and from above, pausing on the landing, Aldous in evening dress looked down at her, seeing her, perhaps, as Beth was seeing her, poised there in the portals of her childhood, soon to be left for ever.

'Better than any fairy prince, you are, Chuffie!' she said, and still holding Chuffie she went slowly up to her father, saying, as she bent her cheek to his kiss: 'I'm all sticky with paint, still, Daddy; you'll hate it.'

Beth saw at once why Aldous was unhappy. Philippa held him at arm's length. She was changed to him.

'It was the nasty office that kept you, as usual, wasn't it?' she said; 'but I wish you'd seen me act. I was wonderful.'

'I see that you were,' said Aldous, and, as they stood together on the landing, his eyes searched his child's eyes and they gave him only their smile. 'Yes; as usual; it was the nasty office. Now I have an official dinner and to-morrow I must catch my early train to a deadly conference at Birmingham. I'll be gone for nearly a week; so I must look my fill of you, Philippa.'

'We shan't really miss each other,' said Philippa, 'because you'll be busy with your conference and I with my work. I'm always glad when school begins again — and always glad when it stops. Daddy wishes he could weigh stardust instead of having to take care of us, Mummie; — but all the same you like us better than stars, don't you, Daddy? — I think I'll be an actress — everybody clapped me — except that I hate painted faces,' said Philippa, holding Chuffie against her cheek, 'and my prince wasn't nearly good enough for me.'

'Can you really weigh stardust, Daddy?' Billy asked. His father charmed him, but he was always a little shy with him, never buffeted or cajoled or hung about him as Philippa did. 'Is there such a thing as stardust? What would be the good of weighing it?'

'To try to find out where it ends and we begin,

perhaps,' smiled Aldous, who usually met Billy's enquiries with parable. 'Your question pierces to the root of all disinterested activity, my child.'

'Isn't the Board of Education disinterested?' Philippa asked. 'But no, of course it can't be; because it's for us, and you're so frightfully interested in us, aren't you?' Though so lightly, she seemed to insist.

'Though I lost you on the Downs I am interested in you; frightfully.' Aldous smiled as if with a challenge.

'Do the Downs weigh on your conscience, Daddy? — I didn't know you were so tender-minded!' smiled Philippa, and she was strange. 'Now it wouldn't weigh on *mine* one bit if I lost you! I'd say it was your own fault!'

'You mean it was yours?'

'I don't mean it was mine at all!' said Philippa, her eyes sliding away from his, though she went on, slightly laughing: 'Everything's a father's fault. That's the advantage of being a child. — Well, good-night, Daddy. — Don't wake me up to-morrow morning to say good-bye if you're too frightfully early,' and again she bent her cheek to his kiss. 'I won't kiss you! The paint would come off my lips.'

'Don't let any of it stick to your eyelashes. — It

makes you look a rather wicked princess,' said Aldous.

'I *am* a wicked princess,' Philippa declared, turning from him to spring lightly up the stairs, chanting, while Chuffie over her shoulder showed indignant eyes: 'Wicked! wicked!' Her voice like a glittering bubble ascended in light bounds, and Aldous stood looking after it. 'Give my love to Grannie, Mummie,' she called. 'And come in to kiss me goodnight when you get back — Daddy will be too late.'

As he passed his wife on the stair, Aldous cast her a hard, wan, cogitating glance.

CHAPTER IV

BETH, making her way wearily by 'bus up Church Street, was remembering the three 'oh's' with which her mother, the other day, had received her telephoned information of Philippa's visit to Rest Harrow. Mrs. Oliffe, since the evening, almost a fortnight ago, of her warning about Mrs. Brandon, had been in the country, but on her return Beth had felt it necessary to avoid any concealment. 'Philippa has just gone down to ride on the Downs with Aldous, at Mr. Chantry's place,' she had said, keeping her voice as casual as possible. 'Oh,' had come her mother's voice. 'Mrs. Brandon asked her — really so kindly, Mother; — knowing the child would love the ride.' — 'Oh,' had come the voice again; a drop of icy water. — 'I really think it'll be all right; Aldous really likes her, you know,' she had bravely enlarged her confidence, and for the third time, with no comment, Mrs. Oliffe had repeated 'Oh.'

It was a comfort to have it over, and since Ida Metcalfe was staying with her mother, Beth felt that she would be immune from attack this eve-

ning. She felt that her mother would detect in every tone of her voice, in every attitude of her body, that she was a woman who had lost her love; that she would see it as quickly as she would have seen that she was going to have a baby. And she was thankful to feel that her tooth was hurting her horribly; it might explain her languor and her pallor.

Her mother's flat looked from its fourth floor over treetops, a high, not unstately room, her father's bronzes set along his massive bookshelves, dark green curtains patterned in dark blue at the tall windows, Chinese embroideries, dark and light, on the piano, and many photographs in silver frames. Mrs. Oliffe rarely had flowers in her room, but there was a little orange-tree in a bronze pot on the bureau and a shining goblet of shells in the window. Ida Metcalfe, whose rough grey locks had been shingled thirty years before, sat knitting by the fire. She was an outmoded rebel who had gone to Girton when it was adventurous to do so, taught Greek and Latin, defended George Eliot's union with Lewes, and walked with banners for woman's suffrage; and, all undiscriminating kindness, she still believed herself fully abreast of the world that hurried past her. She was devoted to her old pupil, though still deploring the irony and worldliness that she had com-

bated years ago when she had coached her and her cousins in the opulent country-house where they first met. It was an intense relief to Beth to have dear old Ida sitting there, an even intenser relief to hear her say once greetings were over: 'So my young friend Philippa has been paying visits.' Her mother then had been talking the adventure over with Ida, and had she dimly surmised Mrs. Brandon's position in their lives, she would have kept a proud silence.

'A delightful visit,' she said. 'Mother was rather against her meeting Mrs. Brandon, but I've met her and she seems to me very charming.'

Her mother, she felt, kept her eyes on her; but they were not too penetrating, and as they went in to dinner, Mrs. Oliffe's laces and hereditary silver always lending majesty to the simple function, she commented: 'I like rides on the Downs for Philippa, even if I dislike Mrs. Brandon.'

'Oh, your salted almonds, Annette!' said Ida, putting out her hand for one as she seated herself. 'I always know I'm in the heart of London when I taste them! — Yes, I've seen her pictures in the papers and she does look charming. And if people are unhappily married, why should they not find a congenial partner? — Yes, dear Annette, you must learn to march with the times.'

'March, my dear? I know too well that unless one does march one is trampled under foot! What is this news I hear about the Bardwells? Is it true that Gregory Bardwell is seeking another partner?'

'Yes; yes, it is,' said Miss Metcalfe, rather sadly drinking her consommé. 'Such a disagreeable woman, who took Chalford Manor for the hunting. Fair and plump and pink and rude. I can't imagine what he saw in her. But poor Margaret has been all that's magnanimous and he has prevailed on her to set him free. Of course she is to be handsomely provided for and he expects to see them constantly, after the modern fashion.'

'She's a fool!' Mrs. Oliffe commented. 'She should have fought to the last ditch. She should have refused to set him free; then what would they have done? — Let me see, there are five children, aren't there?'

'Yes; five,' said Miss Metcalfe, more sadly. 'Oliver just going to Eton.'

'I have a perfectly open mind for irregular passions,' said Mrs. Oliffe, 'and face the fact that man is a polygamous animal; but to abandon a family of five children, the eldest a mere boy, is treachery; inexcusable treachery.'

'But he doesn't feel that he's abandoning

them,' said Miss Metcalfe, though with some uncertainty of tone. 'He expects to see them constantly.'

'Expects to see them! And do they want to see him! I think less well of them if they do. — No, Ida, it's inexcusable. Even the most modern of the moderns — birth control in one hand and endowment of motherhood in the other — repudiates such treachery. Have as many free unions as you like, is what they say; but make marriage indissoluble if there are children. The children are of more importance than the appetites of the parents.'

Beth listened, with head bent down, to the interchange, heavily, yet with a sense of a fluttering breath. And as she heard her mother now defending the nest of life, not with a dove's breast but with an eagle's talon, she felt herself seized suddenly by an almost blithe sense of detachment. This theme was one towards which, most surely, she could feel detached. And it would strengthen her position with her mother if she could speak bravely and candidly. 'What is the good of indissoluble marriage to children if their father and mother are parted?' she asked.

'Parted? They would not be parted. That is my point.'

'By parted I mean — if they don't love each other any longer. Home isn't just the material shelter, Mother; Mr. Bardwell has seen to the material shelter, hasn't he? — It's love. Something that children feel about them like the air; and can grow in.'

'Love? What do you mean by love, my dear child? You don't expect middle-aged parents to maintain a romantic passion for each other.'

'No. — Oh, no' — Beth felt her cheeks beginning to burn. 'Not romantic passion; but caring most. — Being part of the other person; being so much a part that no one else could come between.' But whither was she being led? She wished she had kept silence.

'She wouldn't come between. She'd be outside.' Mrs. Oliffe helped herself to fish with chill security. 'Let him go to her; as long as he comes back.'

'And she to him, you'll concede, then, Annette!' said Miss Metcalfe, her eyeglasses glittering, her old mane tossing at prospect of a fray. 'You don't imply different standards for men and women, I suppose. If the man goes and comes back, the wife may, too.'

Mrs. Oliffe, with a slight smile of patience, indi-

cated the maid filling their glasses, and when she had left the room remarked: 'A time for all things, Ida. Our maids, most of them let us hope, still maintain the illusions of our youth. — Certainly, let the standards be the same, if we are dealing with such people. I don't deal with them; but I concede them the respect due to the consistent. And they have, I feel, some shreds and tatters of morality if they don't allow their personal feelings to injure their children's lives.'

'It's the conventional morality of the Latin races that you are upholding, Annette; limiting woman to the rôle of Hetaira or *haus-frau*. Our English ideal is more difficult but infinitely higher. It's just as Beth says: our home means more than the French *foyer*. It means an atmosphere. No woman can be happy with a husband who is unfaithful to her. Much better that he should go as Gregory Bardwell has gone than keep up a form from which the spirit has departed.'

'As long as there is any form at all there will be enough spirit to uphold it,' smiled Mrs. Oliffe, a bitter inwardness to her smile. 'There will always be enough happiness for the children to grow in if the woman has good sense. She must think of their happiness and not of her own; and who is happy?

We may not care for the French convention, Ida, but I prefer it a thousand times to English sentimentality.'

Beth was wishing she had not spoken.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS not late when Beth returned, but the maids had gone to bed and the house was still. She softly clicked the lights on ahead of her and clicked them off behind her, hoping that Philippa was asleep, and crept up to her room, aware, before she reached it, of the scent of the lavender-water that Aldous had always used and that filled her mind with confused associations of pain and tenderness. — 'He's really so young,' she thought, 'and so am I, really, though he doesn't think of me as young. — If Gregory Bardwell had realised that poor Margaret was really young, could he have gone and left her like that? To leave a wife who loves you *is* to leave a child.' And before she could enter and be safe from further impacts, she heard from above an imperative voice — imperative, yet appealing, too: 'Mummie; I'm awake.'

She did not want to go to Philippa. There had been a hidden meaning under the encounter on the stair. It had almost been as though Philippa had set her and Aldous against each other as antagonists. 'I'm coming, dear,' she said, however; and as

she went up she thought: 'How is it possible to keep one's children happy if one has to hide from them when one is too tired to hide? — A man doesn't need to leave his home to spoil it.'

The spring night was still pale and Philippa's window was widely opened to the sky, with the elm-tree darkly, softly, stirring against it. Her room was at the back; the nursery where Billy slept was across the way. Beth left the door open and came to bend over the young head, poised, watchful, and intent, against crossed arms, on the pillow.

'Oh — but shut the door, Mummie,' Philippa said. 'We mustn't wake up Billy.'

'But I only came to kiss you, darling. — It's late, you see,' said Beth, bent over her.

'It's not a bit late. Ten struck only a little while ago. You've got to stay. Are you warm? Put on my dressing-gown if you're not. You see — I've not really told you *half* about my visit yet. There's not been really time, has there? And school begins to-morrow.'

Beth paused, then went and shut the door.

'No. I'm not cold.' She must not draw back. She was really needed. Philippa had not been merely playing her off against her father. 'I've still got on my cloak and scarf, you see. Yes, I'll be perfectly

comfortable here.' She drew the little wicker chair beside the bed and sat down.

'I'm feeling rather lonely, I suppose,' said Philippa, lying high on her crossed arms. 'I've been feeling rather lonely for three days now. You're lonely, too, aren't you?'

'Lonely, darling?' Strangely mature was the quality of the child's voice, and of her smile, just visible in the pale obscurity. Beth could not find shelter before it. She felt herself, as so often, less mature than Philippa. 'Why, darling?' was all she could reply.

Philippa reflected for a moment. She had been reflecting all evening, lying here in her little bed. 'It's lonely to feel separated,' she said. 'It isn't only because Father's out and that it's always rather lonely in a home when your father and mother aren't in it; but it's not only that; I'm specially separated from Father. Mummie' — and suddenly she turned her head and leaned her forehead against her mother's shoulder — 'I've told a most awful lie.'

'A lie?' The unexpectedness of this avowal flooded Beth's heart with strange relief. Only a lie? Why — that might explain everything.

'Did you, darling? To Daddy?' she asked. And she could almost have added: 'Bless you!'

'Yes. To Daddy. A lie wouldn't separate me much from you, you know; because I'm constantly telling you lies; — little lies, I mean. You're so easy to lie to — poor darling Mummie; and then — I'm nearer Father — aren't I? So that it's worse.'

'Is that why you've been rather strange with Father?' Beth asked after a moment. 'I felt you strange; and I'm afraid that he has.'

'Yes. It's partly why.' Philippa paused. 'It was on Sunday; at Rest Harrow; when I was lost. — I wasn't lost, you know. That is, I was, but I meant to be.'

Beth sat, the child within her arm, and shapes began to range themselves about her. 'To make Daddy think of you?'

'Why, Mummie — how did you know?' Philippa turned her head to gaze up into her mother's face. 'Yes. Just that. To find out if it was real — his pretending not to care so much for her when I was there.'

Beth's blood, which had seemed to melt, to flow, stopped again. 'Did he pretend? But I see; of course I see. Yes. Go on, dear.'

'He pretended and pretended,' said Philippa, swallowing drily but sustained by her mother's calm. 'All that first evening, when she was reading

poetry — trying first one thing and then another — she was pushing against me and trying to make him not pretend. I saw every bit of it, Mummie, and that it made her perfectly wild; — the sweeter and softer she seemed, the wilder she really was. — And though I do think she's rather charming, — I can't help it, — I hate it, too, when her mouth curls up that way; and afterwards, when the light was shining across his horrid old white beard and moustache, I could see that her father's mouth was just the same and made the same "foo" shape. — But I had Daddy close all the time that evening. *I* didn't have to pretend anything; I only had to stay still and look at them both. — And the next morning in the garden it was just the same, except that I *was* pretending then that I liked being all together because that was what Daddy wanted so dreadfully — for us all to be happy together. I kept it up and she tried to keep it up: but at last, when we were out riding, she broke down.'

'Broke down?' Beth asked it carefully as Philippa paused, controlling her breath to the sustaining calmness. What strange initiation was this, to see with her child's eyes into the very centre of her husband's heart? He could not show it to her; but Philippa could.

'I mean she couldn't pretend any longer. She had to find out, too. — You know, Mummie, in a way I'm sorry for her, because I understand just how she feels. I was sorry for her even when she took the chance, when I was behind, to carry him off. He simply had to follow, when she galloped away like that, and I was really angrier with Daddy than with her, and then, when they disappeared, it came into my head to stop and wait and see if she could really make him forget me. And when he didn't come back, I turned and rode in the opposite direction, for miles, Mummie, and for hours. I was really lost. It was dark when Daddy found me.'

Dark. Dark when Daddy found me — the words went on in Beth's mind, repeating themselves. She held Philippa in her arm, and on her shoulder Philippa's head turned restlessly, to look up at her, or lay still while she followed the images she set before them both.

'And did you really see plovers?' Beth heard herself saying.

'Yes, I really saw them.' Philippa looked up at her, understanding the irrelevance. 'I had time for everything, Mummie: I watched them when I lay under a thorn-tree and thought how it would seem to be dead. It makes you feel as if you were dead,

doesn't it, when the person you love most forgets you.'

Beth sat then silent for some moments in the dark and only said, as it were suddenly, remembering that Philippa waited an answer: 'Yes, darling, it does.' And after another silence she added: 'Philippa, darling, when he found you, why didn't you tell him then about the lie? He would have understood.'

'I know he would. I was going to tell him — Oh, Mummie — I wish I had!' The cry broke from Philippa's heart. — 'But he called her Cosima. He forgot to be careful, and all the time before he'd said Mrs. Brandon.'

'That's only a convention, Philippa. Friends use Christian names.'

'Why didn't he use hers, then, before? Why had he pretended to me? It made me angry. It made me feel as if I couldn't tell him *then*.'

'I'm so sorry, darling. It would have been so lovely, when he found you. That would have been the time. — But, Philippa, you'll tell him now. — It's making him so unhappy. He knows there's something wrong and it makes him so unhappy.' — Beth felt her tears rising and only repressed them by an effort — 'And that makes everything un-

happy. You know, in a family, it's like that. We all go together, and if one's wrong, all the rest must suffer for it. — So — if only for my sake, darling ——'

Philippa lay on her shoulder in the dark; very still. Holding her, Beth was now aware, after the quick breathing of her confession, of her deep long breaths and that she was taking counsel with herself. And suddenly, turning on her side, she laid her hand on her mother's arm and hid her face against her shoulder. 'Mummie — I tried; — that very night,' she whispered.

Something in her voice checked the source of Beth's tears. Something new, unimaginably dreadful, in her life. Danger. This was a danger never seen before and it crept towards Philippa. No tears now. No self-pity. 'That night? What happened to prevent, that night? Tell me,' she said.

Philippa thought; rigidly. 'I meant never to tell you,' she said. 'I meant never to tell anyone.' — The grasp of her hand tightened on her mother's arm. 'Only if it's he who's wrong, if it's he who's spoiled everything — oughtn't you to know?'

'That's for you to judge,' said Beth after a moment. 'But I would rather your mind was at rest, Philippa.'

'Well, Mummie' — Philippa turned her head to look before her into the room — 'she didn't come down to dinner and Daddy sent me up to bed very soon because dinner was so late and we were all so tired. I was so tired that I went to sleep at once. When I woke everything was still and I knew that I couldn't bear it unless I told him. He'd been so sweet to me. I had frightened him so dreadfully. He'd quarrelled with her because of me. I saw it all, and I knew that nothing mattered so much as being near him again and that my pretending had been the worst. So I got up and crept out ever so softly — do you know how strange it is late at night, to be alone like that in someone else's house? — it frightened me, as if I were doing something wrong. — My room was up a little flight of stairs; she said it was where she always put children because it was like a fairy-story. — At the foot of the stairs was a long passage with her room in the middle and quite at the other end a big window and Daddy's door next it. I could see it all when I crept down because the moon came in at the window. Monty, the pug, was in his basket outside her door. He snores and she can't bear it; and when I came down, he lifted his head and saw me and gave a little bark. I was dreadfully startled and went back by the stairs and

stood there in the dark waiting until it was quite safe; because I simply couldn't have borne it, Mummie, if she'd seen me going to Daddy like that. — I felt as if she'd know at once about the lie. Already I'd seen that she knew it was a lie. — We understand each other, she and I, dreadfully well. — So I stood there, in the dark, still as a mouse, and heard her door open and shut, and then, after waiting, when I thought all was safe, I came down softly again — and, Mummie, there she was, at Daddy's door, in her white dressing-gown in the moonlight; — and the door opened; and she went in.'

Holding her child, Beth sat stricken to a rocky stillness. But only for a moment. Stillness was an avowal. She lifted her hand, it seemed to need a heavy effort, and stroked back Philippa's hair, quietly, as if accepting strangeness without comment; as if finding it only strange. And she said presently, all her nature strung taut to her need: 'Yes, darling: I see. I see that you couldn't go to him after that.'

Philippa turned her head to look at her. 'I stood there for a moment longer, Mummie, and she didn't come out. — Oughtn't he to have sent her away, however miserable she was?'

'It would have been better, perhaps,' said Beth.

No, with all her fear for Philippa, she was not hating Aldous. How could he have helped himself, loving her so much already? — But how could he love so much a wicked woman? — Her heart lifted for a wild instant on the surge of its loathing; but there were stronger things, even, than the tie, betrayed, of wife and husband. Her maternity, armed and vigilant, mastered the tumult of her own catastrophe. 'He must have been too sorry for her to send her away,' she said.

'But wasn't it wrong?' Philippa whispered.

'Wasn't what wrong? Being sorry?'

'No; going to people's rooms; staying, I mean, with other people's husbands?'

'You don't know that she stayed. She may have talked with him and come away. It might be wrong, very wrong' — Beth picked her way over the red-hot ploughshares of her child's intuitions and innocencies — 'but it all depends on why. If she was too unhappy, on account of you — if they needed to talk it over —— When people are great friends, Philippa, they may do things that other people may not question.'

'Even wives mayn't question?'

'Not even wives if they are wise. — Now, darling, will you go to sleep and not think about it any more?'

'But, Mummie — Mummie,' Philippa pressed herself closely against her, holding her arm. 'You're not as wise as that! — Wives can't be wise if their husbands hurt them so much! — I shall love you best now, Mummie! I'll show him that I love you best and punish him like that!' she cried, breaking into bitter tears.

Beth now felt herself shaking with quick, responsive sobs. 'Don't, darling, don't' — she articulated with difficulty. — 'Don't make me so unhappy!'

'Unhappy because I love you best! You ought to be glad. Why shouldn't you be first! You're far better than he is — far more loving!'

'One doesn't love people for being better — or more loving. — One loves them only for themselves; you know it, Philippa; that's why you love your father — far more then you ever will love me. — Don't talk of punishing him. Put it aside. You'll only hurt yourself horribly if you try that. — People can't help caring.'

'I thought people who were married oughtn't to care for other people,' the child sobbed. 'I thought that was what being married meant! Can't one help caring if one tries in time?'

Over the tumult that still lifted her breast in dry

sobs Beth pressed back the tears that would have undone her: — 'I'm afraid one can't stop in time. — But there are all sorts of love. Married love is sharing a life together. Daddy and I share a life. You and Billy, and our home.'

'But how is it sharing if your fairy prince goes off with another princess? How is it sharing if he cares more for her than for your home? — It's no good, Mummie — poor Mummie; — it can never come right, now; — because he didn't send her away.'

'Yes, it can. He hasn't gone off. If it were only you, that would be enough to keep him. — Being married is more than the fairy prince. — I have his love for you.'

Philippa's sobs were stilled. She lay quiet, now, in a cold lucidity.

'You mean he'd stay with you because of me? — Mummie, I couldn't bear it if my prince cared more for anybody — even if it were my own child.'

'Yes, you could, Philippa. I've had to bear it; always.'

'You could: I couldn't. That's the difference. I'd be too proud. Mummie — you'll never tell him?'

'About your lie? Of course not.'

'No: not that; about what I saw. You must never tell him.'

Beth sat, wrapped in the child's passionate lucidity, confronting her relation with Aldous, his with Philippa. 'Will you, perhaps, then, some day?'

'Never! Never!' said Philippa. 'You and I will know; but he never must.'

'Don't you see, Philippa, that that divides me and your father?'

'Not more than it divides him and me. — Mummie' — Philippa now raised herself to look again into her mother's face — 'it's mine. I needn't have told you. And you must never tell him unless I say that you may. Promise.' Tragic with the weight of their unchildlike burden, the child's eyes held her mother's eyes.

The burden had been laid by Aldous; but she and Aldous shared Philippa. It was because there was the shared life left to her — in spite of all — that it rested now with her to lift what could be lifted of the burden from their child's spirit. And, from the faiths she had set before Philippa, a dimly shining aura lighted her darkness. Let the past be covered. Philippa might forget, if her silence could cover all. 'I promise,' she said. 'And now we must both of us go to sleep.'

CHAPTER VI

OUTSIDE Philippa's door, when she had seen her lie down, had drawn the bedclothes round her shoulders, and stooped and kissed her, murmuring, 'Good-night, darling,' Beth stood still for a moment. The bathroom tap was dripping and she went down and turned it off. It worried Aldous dreadfully if he heard it in the night. The bathroom, fresh and blue and white, with the pretty glazed paper the children had chosen, was a happy little room. — Aldous's big sponge, Philippa's blanched loofah, the buoyant red fish that Billy still loved to float in his bath — all these stabilities seemed to smile at her. Standing there in the bathroom, it was as if nothing had happened to her. She was aware of deadly weariness rather than of any other feeling, and, as she went slowly down to her own room, that the stopped tooth was hurting her very badly. It was only a temporary stopping and the dentist had said that if it hurt too much she could take it out, and now, pulse on pulse, like approaching drums of battle, rising throbs of pain told her that something was indeed amiss. When she

reached her door, she leaned against the wall waiting for the poignancy to pass before she gave heed to a thought, too passionate for divided attention, and remembered a night, years before, when she had had a dreadful toothache and Aldous had comforted and soothed her. 'There; put your head on my shoulder; let me hold you, my poor little suffering lamb,' he had said, touched almost to tears by her uncomplaining pain. It seemed to be the throbbing of her tooth rather than this memory that forced tears to her eyes; she seemed to remember so calmly and to say calmly to herself: 'There still is love; I am still his dear wife; even if he has been unfaithful to me'; but with the word 'unfaithful' the passionate thought crashed through the ramparts of her pain, a ravenous darkness blotting out the sky, and breathlessly, pressing her hand to her cheek, she seemed to see the great beast in fiery snatches — as if by the light of a burning brand. — First, her own pitiful trust that had sent Philippa to such an initiation; then the galloping forms vanishing round the headland of the Downs, and then the moonlit passage where a white form tapped at Aldous's door. 'But if he is faithless now, he was faithless then,' she thought, forcing her mind back to the night of vision when she had lain on Aldous's shoul-

der, and understood, and trusted the child to his new life. 'What is the difference? If there's blame, is it for loving? And how can one help love? I can still understand,' she thought, hardly aware of her own tears, 'I can understand, for him, for Philippa, for myself — because I'm his wife'; — and with the word 'wife' the sudden stillness was laid like balm upon her heart. Here — here, as before, was the clue out of the labyrinth. She must shut her eyes, hold it fast, and walk forward, and, as the resolution came, she heard the sound of his latchkey below.

'Wife; wife,' she repeated mechanically to herself, quelling the panic that sprang up within her — for how was she to meet Aldous? How was she to sleep beside him? How keep from him this knowledge that their child had brought? It seemed to her that his face would be changed when she saw it, and that hers was changed. 'But I'm his wife,' she repeated, still leaning against the door with closed eyes, her hand against her cheek. 'He loves me dearly. We share a life together that nothing can take away.'

He had paused in the hall to look at the letters that the last post had brought, and now, as his footfall came slowly, wearily up the stair, a blind instinct kept her still. All she needed was his love.

He would come up and find her and she would tell him about the horrible tooth and he would be kind again and call her his suffering little lamb. 'That will be enough,' she thought, listening. 'That will shield me. — I shall go to sleep holding his hand and to-morrow I shall be able to go forward.'

But Aldous was not coming up. He turned into the drawing-room. She heard that he stood there on the threshold as if deliberating for a moment, then pressed the electric light and shut the door.

She stood on the cold landing, her pain stilled, her tears checked, and, wave upon wave, shame mounted in her. She saw herself standing there, betrayed, craven in her acceptances. He did not love her. He disliked her. She was the obstacle set between him and the woman for whom he yearned as he sat there below, waiting until the lateness of the hour should give valid excuse for silence when he came at last to bed. She raised her wet, clenched handkerchief and mechanically wiped away the cold tears standing beneath her eyes, and with the gesture, feeling herself abased and shunned, some spring in her nature, wound by the events of the last weeks to a pitch of highest tension broke suddenly and ran down with a dreadful velocity, dropping her to an immeasurable distance from any attainment

of the normal levels of her life. She gathered her evening cloak round her, descended the stairs swiftly and flung open the drawing-room door.

He was sitting under the lamp, reading, and he had thrown a little fur rug taken from the back of the sofa round his shoulders — for the fire had gone out since tea-time, and with a pale, wan, wildish look he glanced round at her, the glance, as he saw her disfigured face, altering to one of dryness, resistance, and caution.

'Do you know where the bottle of iodine is?' Beth asked. The sound of her own voice astonished her. 'I've a horrible toothache and can't find it.'

'How should I know?' said Aldous.

It was his cruelty she felt. Some submerged faculty still took note of the element of falsity in herself that elicited such unkindness; but all that she could feel was that he showed her a calculated cruelty. 'I gave it to you when you scratched your finger some weeks ago. Can you try to remember? I need it badly.'

'I haven't the least recollection of scratching my finger,' said Aldous, turning his eyes back to the paper. 'You may find it in the cupboard over my wash-hand-stand — if what you say is correct.'

Beth closed the door and leaned back against it.

'What do you mean by "if"?' she said. 'I am in great pain. Can't you give me a word of pity?' — And far, far away, deep in her submerged heart, a faint voice still wept: — 'Oh, love me. — Be kind. — I can bear anything if you will only be kind.'

'Certainly,' Aldous turned a sheet and glanced up at the heading of a column. 'I am very sorry. I can give you a word of pity; but I can't tell you where the iodine is.' He seemed to read; with interest.

Beth leaning against the door gazed at him. 'This can't go on,' she said suddenly, in a low voice.

He made no reply.

'You have been spending the evening with Mrs. Brandon,' said Beth. 'Only that explains your attitude to me.'

'I have not seen Mrs. Brandon since Sunday,' said Aldous. 'And I have spent the evening, as I said that I was going to, at the Staff dinner.'

'Then it is because three days have passed without your seeing her,' said Beth. 'It's that that maddens you. You are passionately in love with her and you took Philippa to stay with her on false pretences.'

Aldous now turned his head to give her full attention, though he did not look at her and still held his newspaper before him. 'I suppose I ought not to

have been misled into trusting a jealous woman,' he said, 'but you made such a feint of generosity that I was. I did not hide from you that what you said was the truth. I do love Mrs. Brandon and I believed that you understood and accepted. That was why I took Philippa. You cannot say it was under false pretences. — I have wronged you in no way!' he said with sudden and intense bitterness. 'Why should you grudge me my love?'

Beth was pressing her hands over her face. Aldous's eyes had swept across it and she felt herself ugly, disfigured, repulsive to him. 'Wronged me in no way?' she said, 'when my life is poisoned — and the children's lives! — When you are her lover and can't live without her and long for her day and night! — What do you mean by not wronging!'

'I do live without her. I must live without her. I live for you and the children, and if anything is poisoned it is you who have poisoned it, not I! — I have been faithful to you' — Aldous repeated fiercely and coldly, while Beth as fiercely snatching the word from his lips repeated, wildly laughing — 'Faithful! Faithful!' — And if it were the truth, how irrelevant, when she had heard such words from Aldous, seen such a look on his face. — 'I'd rather have you faithless, then! If this is faith, I'd rather

have you faithless! Go to her! Stay with her! — Since that is what you and she are longing for!'

'Are you suggesting that I should make Mrs. Brandon my mistress?'

'Suggesting! It hardly needs that!'

'I see. You mean to insult her! Your honour is safe in her hands, let me assure you, though hers is not in yours.'

Leaning against the door, Beth still wildly laughed — 'Her honour! You use very old-fashioned terms, my poor Aldous! — You won't find them understood in her world! — If she hasn't taken you yet, it's only because something in you — not in herself — held her back.'

'What do you mean! What are you hinting at? Speak plainly.'

'I mean that she's a woman who has had lovers. I mean that she wants you for her lover. I mean that you won't be her first one — or her last! Things that you and I think insulting, she takes for granted!'

He sat still for a moment; then said in a low voice, the contemptuous smile with which he had heard her fixed icily on his lips: 'I'd rather this conversation ended now. I see why you came down to assail me. You've had some further piece of scandal from

your mother and could not rest until you had wreaked it on me. Please go upstairs now. I shall sleep in my dressing-room and be off early to-morrow. It's as well we shouldn't see each other for a little while. — Only' — his voice changed, was heavy with a new antagonism — 'one thing I ask of you. I can forgive a good deal to insensate jealousy, but it would be intolerably base if you poisoned Philippa's mind against her and me.'

Beth stared at him. What had happened to them both? What had she been saying? This was the dagger. This was a stroke of death and brought her back — as consciousness may return after delirium at the moment of death — to reality. 'Aldous — can you believe that of me?' she murmured after a moment.

But he was too far away. 'I'm afraid I can,' he said, not looking at her. 'I'm afraid I do. I've seen too many signs of it already — though you are an adept at giving fine names to your paltry motives. — The child is completely changed to me since she came home. She will hardly speak to me. — And what you've just said explains it all. You will hardly have left her mind unpolluted when you have such thoughts in your own.'

She still stared at him. It had seemed to her, in

the delirium, that he hated her; but her deepest self had not believed it. She had struck out at him with her half-truths, held by her promise to Philippa not to show him the whole; but she had hoped with the outcry of her agony to draw him near in pity, and now with a deadly deliberation he showed her his heart and what it believed of her. Her blood turned cold. She found the door handle and turned it and left him — sitting there in the cold room with the little rug across his shoulders. Upstairs she locked her door and fell on her bed while the anguish of her tooth, unheeded, seemed but part of the anguish of her thoughts, tearing her down, with fangs and claws, into an uttermost darkness.

CHAPTER VII

'YOU will have to come away with me, Cosima,' said Aldous. 'You will have to be my wife.'

Ten days had passed since they had parted at Rest Harrow, and now they sat in the black-and-silver drawing-room, she in a corner of the sofa, he beside her on a chair, and he held her hand — laid palm upward — by the wrist; a hard, unloverlike grasp. But, though so still, their eyes not resting on each other, they had but just withdrawn from the embrace with which their craving hearts had met; a passionate embrace; avowing and demanding all.

'You mean that your wife won't accept our friendship,' said Cosima. 'Is it because of her that you've kept away from me all these days?' She was pale, blissfully pale, for it was in moments like this that life justified itself to her, and to prolong them was her joy and art.

'I don't think that's an accurate way of putting it,' said Aldous. He, too, was pale and the moment had no joy or art for him. 'It's not friendship. It never has been friendship; I see that now. It's our love she can't accept and it's I who can't accept friendship.'

'Then is that why you've kept away?' She adored his sternness. It was his icy fire her softness craved; but she was unprepared and evaded the challenge set before her. 'Didn't you see what it was that Sunday night at Rest Harrow?'

He looked down now into her great eyes, so dark and unfathomable, seeking a clue of light. It was, he thought, his failure, his frailty, to feel ambiguity in her. He was fifteen years her senior; she was a child beside him; he must show her not his infatuation but his trust; he must protect her from herself and elicit the loveliness of spirit that allured him and was her reality. If it was to mean this, it was to mean something grave, significant, even tragic; and so, atoning; not something sweet and intoxicating. They would pay the price, not skulk and shuffle. So, looking into her eyes, he said: 'I saw how it was with me; but not with you. You gave yourself to me just now; you took yourself away the other night.'

'Because you didn't want me,' she said, and her smile was daring and melancholy. 'Because you didn't really want me then. I've always been yours; always; from the first moment I saw you, last winter; — do you remember when you came, on that snowy night, when I was by the fire longing to be

dead? — Your greatcoat was thrown back, you had your hat in your hand, and your hair was tossed, like Shelley's. You made me think of a picture I saw long ago when I was a child, by Burne-Jones — I don't like him; but I've never forgotten that picture of Perseus and Andromeda. Your eyes were like the Perseus as you looked at me; so grave and bright and far away. Daddy had told you all about me. You were rescuing me in your thoughts before you saw me.'

He held her wrists tightly, dwelling on her. It had been as she said. All the monotony and staleness of his middle years had been swept from him as he saw her, so young and sorrowful; a child drooping by the fire. His love for Beth those many years ago had been like waking in the dawn. They had gone forward like two children to find the rising sun sparkling among the thickets. — Dew and the song of the lark, and then, little by little, hand in hand — the common light of day. There had been no ache, no fear, no passionate delay and brooding. But from the first his love for Cosima had been like a night, drawing, alluring him, with veiled stars, soft darkness, the sound of a hidden river running dangerously. 'It's been too much for us,' he said. 'And now we must face it.'

Cosima raised the hand he held by the wrist and seemed for some moments to study her own palm. Indeed, within, she was taking most profound counsel with herself. Did she want to be Aldous's wife? She wanted anything rather than to lose him. 'What could she do but accept our love, if friendship were all there were to see?' she asked.

He had turned his mind from that dewy memory of Beth and now she set her again before him, Beth in the light of common day, fallen on the dusty road, cruel, paltry, accusing him and Cosima of baseness. He saw her disfigured face, her strangely shining eyes, and with a mingling of pity and repulsion recalled her accusations. 'I should loathe a secret intrigue,' he said.

'Oh!' Cosima glanced swiftly up at him, then back at her palm. 'Oh!' she repeated. It was as if he had thrown a stone at her. 'Who wouldn't loathe it called by that horrid Mid-Victorian name?'

'To tell lies to one's wife is a horrid thing: — in any epoch.'

'Is a hidden love the same thing as a secret intrigue? It sounds so different. It sounds rather beautiful. Isn't love something no one else has a right to know about?'

'One's wife, one's trusting wife, has a right to know about it.'

And it was he who now set Beth before her. Cosima, taking deep counsel with herself, saw Beth again, in this room; a flustered little frump, even then suspicious — she would not have been so flustered if she hadn't been suspicious — with a seed-pearl necklace and alarmed eyes like a hare's. And Aldous admired her poems. It had touched him to speak of them and under her lightly probing questions he had fallen silent; at all sorts of odd little times in their past, he had fallen silent when she probed him about Beth. And suddenly she was jealous of standards not her own. 'He and she would be nearer than he and I,' she thought, repelling intolerable suspicion and taking swift decision. 'He will love me all the more if I am courageous.' And she said, still holding up her hand, still scanning it, believing herself calm, though her heart was beating loudly: 'Aldous — did you know I'd had two lovers already?'

He sat there beside her holding her wrist. He was silent. The black pug, lying curled on the sofa, got up slowly, stretched himself forward, then backward, casting a melancholy, sidelong glance upon them, and jumped down and walked with stately

tread to his basket; black-cushioned, tagged with silver. He lay down heavily, and propped his chin, with a deep sigh, upon the satin rim; and Cosima, watching him with unseeing eyes, felt a slow anger stealing over her. Did Aldous imagine her abashed? Did he imagine it a confession of guilt? 'I don't like lies, either,' she said, while a dull colour mounted to her cheek. 'And I don't like wives; so if you want me to be yours, you must know the truth. There was someone before poor Jack. I've had no secret intrigues in my life — but I've had hidden loves. — Haven't you ever guessed? I've hidden nothing from you.'

'No; I've never guessed.' He looked at her hand, but he was seeing Beth; trying to remember something that Beth had said. Beth had spoken the truth, then.

'Do you mind it very much?' She controlled her voice to ask.

'I suppose I do.'

'Do you mean that it makes you jealous?'

'Perhaps it's that.'

'But if I were a widow — a legal widow, who'd had two husbands — for I don't count Eustace; — how would it be different? Do wedding-rings and bishops really make so much difference to you?'

Now, at last, he was aware of the change in her voice, and of her. His eyes turned on her and he looked at her for a moment, then raised her hand and gently kissed it. 'My poor little Cosima,' he said, 'you have suffered a great deal.'

She kept her flush, measuring his meaning, and suddenly, finding it only kind, her breast lifted, her tears came, and remembering all the past, its wild fears and furtive bereavements, she bent forward and put her hands before her face.

'Darling Cosima. — My darling child,' Aldous said. Already his past love and its illusions seemed unreal. Already his love was assuming its new shape, welding her image, thus marred, the more devoutly into the substance of his spirit. 'You see,' he said, his lips against her hair, 'I could not bear merely to be another.'

'No; no; — I see; — I see, Aldous — though I'd have been so willing!' she articulated with difficulty, seeing his loveliness make a new bond between them, feeling herself swept from her mean orbit into his. — 'I was so miserable with Eustace: — he wasn't bad; — he meant well, poor old thing — but he spoiled everything. — You know I was only nineteen. — If I'd been happy, I should have been a faithful wife. But I can't live without love,

and when I love, I give... You'll have to take me as I am, Aldous' — he had come to her; his arms were round her; — 'not a thread of Victorianism in my wardrobe. — I'm sorry, darling, if you mind; — but not a bit sorrier than if it had been two husbands instead of two lovers — and I want to be your wife — if this is marriage.' Already it was something she had never known before. His arms were round her, her head was on his shoulder, and yet he was still thinking of her rather than of himself. — 'I'm like little Diamond — do you remember?' she said, 'in the North Wind's hair' — and, the thought of the vast orbit still with her, she saw herself meshed in tresses that streamed against the stars. 'I'll follow you anywhere. I'll be your faithful wife.'

'My brave darling. — My beautiful darling' — he murmured. 'It's you who are the North Wind. — It's you who are beauty and wonder.'

'No; I'm not North Wind a bit. — Oh, don't think it, Aldous! — I'm only little Diamond, curled up and amazed — but safe; safe for the first time in my life. — I see everything you mean and why it's better. With you it is better. — Shall we go away at once? I'd rather it were at once, now that it's all come upon us. — Only — how are you going to

manage it, North Wind, dear?' She turned her face to look up at him.

'I can manage it because a miracle has happened.' He looked down at her and she saw that her trust touched him almost to tears. 'This has all only been possible because of a miracle. — I've been left a fortune, Cosima.'

'A fortune? Really a fortune? — What do you mean?'

'What seems one to me. An old uncle has died and left me all his money. — You see — otherwise — I couldn't have given up my post. But now I can go away with you and leave them nearly as well off as they are now, with me to work for them. — I've thought it all over, Cosima.'

She saw that he had. She saw now, in his strained and altered face, signs of grief and struggle she had not seen before, or had interpreted as tributes to their personal problem. But he was not only her lover. She must accept that. 'When did you hear?' she asked, wondering how much had been for her, how much for them.

'Three days ago. The letter was forwarded to me at Birmingham.'

'That's why you came?'

'Yes. It released me. I've been in torment

since that night at Rest Harrow, seeing no way out.'

'But, Aldous — would you never have told me if your uncle hadn't died?'

'I did tell you; on that Sunday night.'

'But would you never have asked me to love you?'

'I was trying not to. I was hoping I could still see you — and be sure of myself — after what had happened.'

'Oh — Aldous — you couldn't have been!' She put her arms around him, holding him, hers, against the past menace of separation. — 'You couldn't have been sure — when we love each other so much! — I want you starry — but I don't want you as starry as that! — That would have been the back of the North Wind for me — wouldn't it!' she laughed brokenly. — 'Ice, and bare feet in the snow, and a dreadful frozen figure. — No! Don't let's even think of it!' — and she turned her face against his breast.

'We needn't think of it now. It's past. We are together. — What would have happened I can't tell. — But now I can take care of them, really take care of them, and watch over them. Beth has a full life and her mother and dear little Billy. — She will

face it and forgive me. And Philippa will be with us.' His arms held her, his head was against her head; how strange the shock of fear that went through her, hearing these words. — 'I know that I can explain it to Philippa and that she will come to us. — These things are possible nowadays. They needn't mean severance and ugliness. — It isn't as if I didn't love them all as much as ever.'

There came to Cosima a vision seen once before in a dream; a stare that stretched out and touched her — and with it a thought as dreadful: 'Can I draw back now?' But the dream had been a nightmare and Aldous exorcised nightmares; Philippa thought her lovely and Aldous would adore her the more if she made Philippa happy. Only; — to live with them? She felt herself struggling in darkness and where was she being swept? But to fling herself away from Philippa would be to fling away from Aldous. Nothing that she could say but might hurt the beauty, bring pause, fear, uncertainty to his mind. 'Best wait,' she thought, closing her eyes on panic. 'Best wait. I'm safe now; with him, and anything may happen before she comes into our lives again.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE loveliest May afternoon. Philippa had just come in from school and sat on the floor at her mother's feet leaning her arm on the sofa and half-looking at the advertisements in the magazine which lay upon her lap; — the sententious men steeped in tobacco; the sylph-like girl outrageously shadowed by festoons of double-chin; the smiling ladies with the triangular film laid across their teeth; — 'And it feels exactly as if *we'd* had a film over our teeth ever since Daddy went away,' Philippa thought, while she listened to Grannie talking of the wonderful inheritance. She was tired after her game of tennis and, keeping dark surmises at bay, felt the sweetness of the sunny air coming in at the open window while she waited for tea. It was almost like summer. Would she and Daddy have their ride on Saturday?

'Of course you'll move into a larger house,' Mrs. Oliffe was saying. Philippa had never seen her so excited. She sat in her corner of the sofa, upright and elegant, her hands clasped on her silken lap, her dark eyes echoing the sparkle of the diamonds in her

ears. The pride of life; the joy of life; the savour of life; — delicately strong, exquisitely adapted to grace and decoration. And it was dear of Grannie to care so much for their good fortune and to feel her own fires so lighted by the glow of theirs. 'That's what mothers are like,' thought Philippa. 'And I wonder if I ever could be!'

'This house is very pleasant, very adequate to a thousand a year,' said Mrs. Oliffe, 'but with over two thousand, Philippa growing up, and Aldous fond of a little entertaining, it's essential that you should frame your lives as you've never been able to do before. Philippa must go as soon as possible to a first-rate boarding-school — Evelyn Merton's girls are delighted with theirs in Wiltshire; — and you must take her and Billy abroad in the holidays for languages. — It can all be managed excellently, with a little care and foresight.'

Mummie, very pale, sat in her corner, a slight abrasion on her lip and a scarf tied round her suffering head. She had had a horrible week with her tooth and it had been drawn only yesterday. But that was not the only reason for her pallor, though it did well enough for Grannie. Philippa knew that her father had slept in the dressing-room on the night before his departure over a week ago,

and that her mother had had but one letter from him since he had gone to Birmingham; the letter announcing Uncle Edward's death and their inheritance. Mummie was perfectly miserable; and she herself was miserable. 'Only I do hope she won't look like that when he gets back,' she thought. The way to deal with Daddy was to be light, blithe, indifferent. It was so one could make him really uncomfortable, and if he found it too uncomfortable he would be forced to give up Mrs. Brandon. 'That's all there is to *that*' — Philippa said to herself, quelling the dull flame that crept up in her heart and glancing impatiently at the advertisements — 'Why can't anybody in advertisements keep their mouths shut! — Teeth — teeth — teeth everywhere! — I don't want to go to a boarding-school, Grannie,' she said. 'Daddy wouldn't hear of it. He only sees me in the evenings.'

'And I couldn't bear to leave this house, Mother,' said Beth, following up the opportunity Philippa opened — though how much rather she would not talk at all Philippa knew. — 'I'm so fond of it. We've always lived here. Only last autumn we put in the Prunus Pissardi; — and there are hundreds of bulbs in the garden.'

'Bulbs and Prunus Pissardi, my dear! Can't you

plant them anywhere! Don't be childish, Beth. This is a serious matter. You are far too cramped here already. The children have to sit all over you doing their lessons. I saw Billy and his atlas in the dining-room as I came past and it's really almost sordid. Aldous said only the other day that he had no place for his books. — You mustn't be sentimental. When your children are nestlings, you may occupy a nest, but when they are beginning to fly, you must leave it.'

Grannie was just a little tiresome, Philippa thought, glancing up at her mother who made no reply, only raising a hand to draw the scarf more closely round her head. She herself felt well able to deal with Grannie; for the more you had to bear, the more, she had already discovered, you could do with people; and since Mrs. Brandon's emergence into their lives, she had never been so aware of her own independence of Grannie's judgments or of what poor Mummie's emergency demanded of solace and adroitness. 'Mummie was quite fond of Uncle Edward, Grannie,' she remarked. 'She's the only one who's been thinking about him at all. I expect she'd rather wait till Daddy gets back to talk about the money.'

'And when does he get back? — Nonsense, my

dear, your mother never saw Uncle Edward but once, to the best of my recollection. — When does Aldous get back, Beth? And when did you last hear from him?'

'On Tuesday, Mother. — He said very little, you know; I told you about the letter. This inheritance will give him a good deal to do.'

'Naturally; but it will hardly give him much to do in Birmingham. I wonder he's not here now.'

And that was what poor Mummie was wondering, of course. Strangely blind even loving mothers could be; and was it love to want so tenaciously for people what they did not want for themselves? 'Here's tea,' said Philippa, 'and the letters. — Perhaps we'll hear from Daddy now.' For the door had opened, and, preceded by Chuffie, Barton entered, carrying the tray. — 'Yes, my lamb, you shall have your milk in a moment; — oh, *don't* wail like that!' Philippa stroked a hand over Chuffie's back and handed the letters to her mother. — 'There *is* one from him, Mummie.' — It lay on the top and her grandmother's sharp eye had already espied it. 'Look, Grannie, look at Chuffie begging for his milk! Would you like to give it to him? With just a drop of cream, because we're so much richer now. — He'll curl his paw round your

wrist to draw it down. — Steady, Chuff! — It's all the little things of being rich I like best, rather than the big ones. I don't believe I care much about the big ones. — *Do* look at him!' Mummie would much rather not have to read the letter before them and Philippa made a little bustle to shelter her reading.

'You won't learn much about the big ones on two thousand a year.' Grannie's caustic smile was very kindly. 'You won't have a Rolls-Royce, but, with care, you may take a taxi.'

'And with care can I be presented and wear a silver train and plumes on my head? — Have a tea-cake, Grannie, while the tea draws.'

Grannie took a tea-cake, Chuffie, choking with purrs, lapped in threes, while, above Philippa's head, her mother sat reading the letter. It would be fun to be presented. In six years' time, perhaps. What would the fashions be like then? And should she have cut off her hair or wear it in a great braid coiled round her head? She wanted to be very fashionable and very unlike other people too: and only clever dressers could manage that: she would be clever and look like a fashionable fairy-tale princess.

'Well, does he get back to-day, Beth?' Grannie asked in her mellow mood, watching Chuffie lap.

'He's left us,' said Beth. She sat with the letter still in her hands, and as Philippa looked up at her she saw no expression at all in her face: only that her eyes were fixed and bright and that the abrasion at the corner of her mouth marked more sharply on her skin; and with a blandness hardly sharpened Mrs. Oliffe repeated: 'Left you, my dear?' She had no idea what the words portended. 'Is he going somewhere else?'

'Yes. He's going somewhere else. He's left us,' Beth repeated. And it was now her voice rather than her words that conveyed disaster to her mother's ear; the voice, vanishing into darkness, of a creature entombed.

As if with a blaze of upward flame, seizing the letter, Mrs. Oliffe cried: 'Left you!' And, defenceless, Beth sat silent. There was no longer anyone left to defend. He could no longer be interpreted, shielded, or exonerated. He was gone.

'Gone,' Philippa said to herself. Could a father leave his children? But she understood; she understood perfectly, seeing Mrs. Brandon's head swooning against her father's shoulder — where it had longed to lie. As her grandmother's voice had flamed, so the child's heart flamed, strange pictures on the ascending blaze of hatred — for had she not

known since the concert that it must end in this, unless Daddy could be saved from her? — Daddy had not longed; he had only gazed and asked for nothing but his wonder; but he could never escape Mrs. Brandon now; never: and as the sharp knife of realization cut down through the centre of her being, Philippa drew away from her mother, turning her face aside.

'He is demented,' said Mrs. Oliffe. She laid the letter down on her daughter's lap. 'He is demented.' Beth said nothing. 'Have you been suspecting this?' Mrs. Oliffe asked in a low voice. Beth shook her head.

'He seems to say you did.'

'Not this. I knew that he loved her.'

'Has it been going on for long? I thought it was only the other day he met her.'

'No. Since last winter.'

'And you knew nothing of it till the other day?'

'No; not till the other day, Mother.'

'He is demented,' said Mrs. Oliffe again, and silence fell.

They had forgotten her, and all Philippa asked was to be forgotten. But the letter lay there within reach of her hand and she turned herself softly and took it and, unrebuked, read what he had to say.

'My dear Beth,' — The letter was written from his London club; — 'Try to forgive me and to think kindly of me. I have no excuse to offer but the one fact you saw so clearly the other night; I love Cosima Brandon and I leave London with her to-day. I think that you yourself felt that this was the best. I was in torment that night; forgive me if I was cruel and unfair. You have nothing to reproach yourself with, dear Beth; no man could have had a better wife and truer friend; it is only I who have failed, or turned aside. It's been too much for me. — Without Uncle Edward's legacy I don't know what would have happened, but now that it has come miraculously, I can assure you and the children nearly as much as you have ever had, and I shall always be there, watching over you all and seeing you as often as you will let me — when you have set me free. I beg you to face it with reason and kindness, dear Beth. We will keep all that can be kept — and why should it not be a great deal? You are all as dear to me as ever. Harris & Bowes will communicate with you at once and I will write to you from France — and to Philippa. Good-bye, my dear, dear Beth. Your devoted Aldous.'

Philippa looked at the words and saw a strange, stricken, fleeing face. He was unhappy. He was

very unhappy, and he was, as he fled, nearer her than her mother could ever be. Without her father, what did her mother mean? She was alone, desperately, wildly alone as a wounded animal, and her young eyes had the wild look of an animal that, keeping its feint of composure, glances from side to side seeking a refuge where it may die unseen.

It was her mother who first spoke again. Chuffie was mewing, and her mother said almost fretfully: 'He wants some more milk. Don't let him cry,' and handing down the milk-jug to Philippa she leaned forward and poured out the three forgotten cups of tea, adding water, sugar, milk to the taste of each, and, as automatically, Mrs. Oliffe took her cup and drank.

'Yes; it goes on like this: just like this,' Philippa thought, watching Chuffie lap his second saucer of milk. 'If one of us were to fall down dead, the others would be drinking tea in a little while. And why not? But this is worse than death,' she thought, 'far worse. You keep people for ever when they die and I wish he had died before she took him.'

'I don't want to say a word to add to your grief and shock, my poor child,' said Mrs. Oliffe. She had drained off her cup and set it down. Her face was altered and her voice; it was a sword she drew,

carefully, testing the blade along her palm. 'But one thing is clear to me and you must keep it clear. — This is an infatuation; an aberration. Middle-aged men don't, at a day's notice, abandon their families unless they are demented or bewitched. — We'll waste no words on arraignments,' said Mrs. Oliffe, and she wasted no words, 'but you will not for one moment consider setting your husband free to marry his paramour.'

Paramour; what a heavy, what a sweet, scented word. It rang in Philippa's ears softly, heavily, with a drugged, a perilous sweetness. That was what it was like to be a paramour. Thickets of dark flowers shut out the stars; a hand crept out and closed on one's heart — closer, closer; suffocating; one could not escape a witch. — It was a shameful word.

'Mother; — don't,' said Beth faintly.

'Let the child hear the facts called by their names,' said Mrs. Oliffe with still passion. 'Let the younger generation who have to face the wreckage made by their elders see what comes of selfishness and sensuality and self-deception. I warned you against the woman; you will remember that, Beth. I warned you, and already I felt Aldous's relation with her to be ambiguous; — but I could not have

dreamed of this. If you had been made of sterner stuff, you would have refused to call on her and refused to let your child be taken to her house. The old divisions still stand, cloak them as one may, and our laws still recognise them. You are a wife and she is a paramour, and she is to be dragged in the mire, where she belongs, not you. — You hear what I say, Beth? You will not allow your husband to give this woman your name and your children's name. You will not allow her to steal your status as well as your husband.'

Beth rose up now. 'Will you forgive me, Mother? — I think I must lie down. I'm not very well, you see.' She smiled; her eyes were bright; she brightly tapped the scarf against her cheek. 'It would be better for me to lie down. We'll talk later.'

'Yes — my poor darling. Yes; — forgive me' — Mrs. Oliffe, too, had risen. Her delicate features suddenly quivered, grimaced — 'It's because ——'

'Yes; yes; I understand ——' Beth said brokenly, fleeing, stumbling out of the room. — 'Oh, Grannie must not cry,' thought Philippa. 'No one must cry now.' She put her hand under her mother's arm and went up the stairs with her, helping her to escape Grannie. She hoped that she would say nothing to her. As she went she was praying to

herself: — 'Oh, don't let her say anything to me. Let us both be alone — quite alone.'

In her mother's room the sun flooded in and the muslin curtains flapped softly in the open windows. There were the two beds with the pretty blue silk covers, side by side, and Daddy's photograph in its old silver frame, on the dressing-table, where it had stood as long as Philippa could remember, Daddy with a rounder, younger face and almost merry eyes; the long photograph of Daddy and the rowing crew at Cambridge; Mummie as a little girl with a fringe across her forehead; Christopher's big photograph on the wall, and the little bedside table with Daddy's books and Mummie's travelling-clock and the smell of lavender water coming in from the dressing-room. The door was open, and Beth, leaning on the bed with one hand to unbuckle her shoes, nodded towards it and said: 'Will you shut it? And — don't go down to Grannie,' she said as Philippa returned to take off the bed-cover. — 'Go to your room, Philippa. — Grannie will understand.'

'I expect she'll go home soon, but I'll see her first.' Philippa drew the eiderdown over her mother. 'Shall I get your hot-water bottle? Your feet are cold.'

'No. — Nothing. — No; I'm not cold. Oh, Phil-

ippa!' — said her mother, and Philippa's heart throbbed up to her throat and seemed to stop her breath with fear. — 'Oh — we were angry with each other! — We were angry with each other,' she repeated, lying extended on the bed and pressing her hands down on her eyes. — 'I said cruel things — and he said cruel things — but I thought he would forgive me and come back and tell me so!'

Philippa stood rigidly at the foot of the bed. She knew that she was sick with pity, but she seemed to feel nothing but fear. 'It wasn't your fault,' she said, forcing herself to speak, and she might have been the grown woman speaking to the child. 'He was glad of an excuse.'

'Oh, no: — oh, don't! He did not mean this then. I know that he did not mean it and I misjudged him. — But when one is married, everything can come right.' Mummie was sobbing, horribly sobbing, her hands before her face. 'That's what I believed — all these days — that it must come right when he came back and I could tell him that I was sorry.'

'Why should you be sorry? Don't be sorry. He was glad of an excuse,' Philippa repeated.

'But he is sorry; — in his letter — he says that he is sorry.'

'To have hurt you. But he is glad to go away. He loves her best.'

'No; — no — no' — Beth drew her hand across her eyes, clearing them of tears so that she could look at her child; — 'I have lost him; but you haven't. I'm gone; burnt out; forgotten; — but you are real. He loves you best. You are nearer him than anyone in the world. He loves you with all his heart.'

'And I hate him with all mine!' said Philippa, turning with a haughty glance of defiance and walking out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

OH — I hate him — but I love him too, and I can't bear it!' Philippa sobbed into her pillow. The day was over and she was alone. Poor Billy, aware but unquestioning, had gone to bed; Mummie was safely shut into her own room and it was Mummie she feared. The more she pitied Mummie the further away did Daddy go, and though she hated him it was him she needed. 'Never, never will I see him!' she sobbed, fiercely repudiating the stumbling phrases in his letter: — 'Watching over you all' — 'Seeing you often.' — He meant to come back and live near them with Mrs. Brandon. Come back to live in a world he had poisoned! 'He is silly,' she whispered to herself, 'silly.' — And, applied to Daddy, it was a fierce, scorching word. Could he really believe that she and Mrs. Brandon might be united in a shared life? From the beginning — she saw it now with flashing clarity — that was what he had hoped for. He had been planning their meeting that afternoon at the concert while the black-and-silver hat tilted towards him. It had been of her as much as of Mrs.

Brandon he had been thinking while the phrases of the Trio flowed about them, and, the memories crowding one upon the other, she heard the Schubert and the plovers' cries together and saw the face of Mrs. Brandon turned to meet, unseeingly, her own fixed distant stare. 'He can't be happy unless we can be combined; but when he finds I won't see her, he'll hate her and leave her. — "Foo — foo,"' she said in the dark, making her mouth curl upwards round her teeth. Could one escape a paramour?

They all told Mummie that one could. They all told her in the days that followed that, if kept there in her place, Mrs. Brandon might be escaped, and poor Mummie tried not to argue with them. She loved him and wanted to set him free because she loved him. Or was it that he had hurt her so terribly that she did not want to keep him? Philippa from her distance watched and saw her grow strange and strained and shrunken as the struggle went on, within her and without. 'I should let him go,' she thought. 'I should let him go as far as ever he wants to.' But it would not be because she loved him. The further he went the more he would suffer. 'And to me he may come back,' Philippa thought, 'but never, never to her.' Mrs. Brandon had some-

thing that Mummie had never had; something that Daddy needed. Philippa knew what it was, though she could not have named it. She had seen it in her own proud young face when, with a sidelong glance, she turned from her mirror to reënter the world of childhood. It waited for her, when she should have done with childhood: it would never fail her. Mummie had never looked at herself like that. She had looked beyond herself, yearning, questioning and uncertain. Mummie's self was all broken up into other selves; she only found herself in them; she was a mother. And Mrs. Brandon was a paramour. 'And I'm neither,' thought Philippa, following the strange thoughts that were leading her so far away from childhood. 'I'm I.'

She could hear what Mr. Wedderburn said to Mummie in the drawing-room by standing outside the door and hardly bending at all to listen; and had she not a right to know what was to happen to her life? She as much as Mummie was concerned. 'My dear Beth,' said Mr. Wedderburn, 'he has behaved like a cad and it isn't for you to reward him.' 'He doesn't mean that, Beth,' said Mrs. Wedderburn quickly — and Philippa could infer, though she had not caught, her mother's murmur of protest; — 'It's only that we're both so miserable; — so angry.'

Was he a cad to love somebody else? Could he have helped himself? Philippa's cheeks had flamed as she heard the word. He meant to come back, even though she would not see him; he meant to ride with her in Richmond Park again, and tiptoeing softly upstairs to her own room, on this day a week after her father had left them, she unlocked a precious little box with shells on it and took out her father's letter, lying under the bright curl of Christopher's hair.

'My own darling — When we are together again you will forgive me. You know that I love you all. It is only that another love has come and seems to take me away, but it will only be for a little while. Write to me, dear child — I long to hear what you are doing, every detail of your life. We can all be happy if you will be generous. I mean you to be as much in my life as you ever were; nearer and dearer all the time. There will be lovely things for us to do together. Bless you, darling. Your own

'DADDY'

And underneath, in a large, black, fluent hand had been written, 'Robin will be waiting for you, Philippa dear — C. B.' But Philippa had torn that off; torn it off and crushed it in her hand and taken a

match and burnt it to a brittle whiff of writhing black. That was what she would like to do to C. B. Burn her at the stake. And yet, even as she thought it and saw her writhe, there drifted over her a sense of drugged sweetness. She knew what Daddy felt.

She had not answered the letter. She waited to answer it. And the longer she delayed the worse Daddy over there in France would feel. It was not till Mrs. Merton came to see Mummie that she wrote. Mrs. Merton's car, seeming to fill the little street, waited outside one afternoon when she got in from school. Philippa did not know Mrs. Merton very well, but they had stayed with her in the country, where she had a big house in a park and stags' heads round the hall. 'You have no right to desecrate a sacrament, my dear Beth,' Philippa heard her say when, once again, she paused outside the drawing-room, and Mummie murmured something about sacraments to which Mrs. Merton with severe and gentle urgency replied: 'But you believe in marriage, Beth; you believe in the family; you don't condone your husband's behaviour.'

'If we'd had no children? — If there'd been no family, would you call it desecrating a sacrament?' Mummie now found almost a firm voice to question.

'Certainly; with my religious beliefs I should. We are all members one of another and a wrong done to one weakens all. You are dedicated to a shared life. You are one flesh.'

'Aldous isn't religious.'

'But you are.'

'Not in that way, Evelyn; — I don't mean it's not right.'

'You don't believe in free-love, Beth.'

'No; — no. I'm not free; but he is if he wants to be. I'm one flesh, but he isn't.' Philippa could only hear Mummie's faltering voice by laying her ear to the keyhole. 'How can I keep him tied? He would come to hate me.'

'Yes; he would certainly come to hate her,' Philippa said to herself, tiptoeing backward. 'He won't hate me, however much I punish him; but he'll hate her. She can't make him understand what he's done; but I can.' She turned at the stair and found Billy standing above her, his hand on the baluster, his mild gaze enlarged by his spectacles fixed upon her. Philippa flushed. Billy was five years younger than she was, a very little boy, kindly but casually regarded by the so-much-older sister; but she knew now, as, saying nothing, he went on downstairs, that something catastrophic had happened to their

relation. 'A boy who eavesdrops is a sneak,' she thought, following him slowly down and taking counsel with herself. 'It's all Daddy's fault. How can I help wanting to know?' And assuming an air of nonchalance she sauntered after Billy into the dining-room and went to the shelves in the corner as though looking for a book. Billy had pulled his chair to the table and propped his head over his studies.

'Why aren't you in the nursery?' asked Philippa after a moment, though she knew that Billy and his books had outgrown the nursery table.

'I always do my lessons here,' said Billy.

'You see, Billy,' she went on, taking down Greville's 'Memoirs,' 'they keep things from me that I've a right to know.'

Billy looked very unhappy. 'I suppose it's more boys who mustn't do it,' he said after a moment.

'Boys! You don't imagine that boys have more sense of honour, do you?'

'Oh, no!' Poor Billy was confused. 'Perhaps it's only that they don't care so much to know.' He was never self-righteous and always courteous.

'Don't you care to know what's happened to us — what's going to happen to us? Don't you hate the way they look at you in school and the way the

maids are sorry for us? — Cook began to cry when I went down to the kitchen for some milk for Chuffie yesterday!' cried Philippa fiercely, her hand clenched at her side.

'Well, of course they're sorry for us if our father has left us,' said Billy, looking down at his books. 'I suppose he isn't coming back.'

'You *do* want to know whether he is! As much as I do! That's why I listened. — And he's not coming back — I know that! He's not coming back for years and years and years if he ever does at all. Perhaps Mummie will be dead and you and I will be grown up before he comes,' she cried, gazing at the pictures she set before herself, Daddy old and bent, in the snow, approaching a lighted house where, with a fairy wreath on her head, she danced with Roger Wedderburn, forgetting him.

'Mummie dead?' Billy repeated in a low voice. From where Philippa stood she saw only his tousled mouse-coloured hair and round pale cheek; but his hand lay along the edge of his book and, as she fixed her eyes on it, it seemed to her suddenly a sorrowful hand. It was rather grey and grubby, but it was sorrowful: the hand of a small boy who would be brave, but who might be feeling even more than she was.

'Well, I don't mean she'll have to be; I only mean we'll all have to die some day, and before he comes back it may be she. Don't think of it, Billy; she's very strong; there are years and years before us all yet.'

Philippa went upstairs slowly, not pausing at the drawing-room door where Mrs. Merton's expostulating voice still went on and on. She would never stop outside the drawing-room door again. For it had come to her that Billy was suffering as much as she was and how was a small boy with a grubby little hand to get on without a father? She went to her room and took out the box with shells on it and her writing-case and wrote her reply to her father:

'Dear Daddy, I shall always love you, but I can never forgive you because fathers oughtn't to leave their children, and Mother is one flesh even if you aren't. She is having a dreadful time and everyone is telling her she mustn't set you free to marry Mrs. Brandon. I think she will, but I wish she wouldn't because she is your wife and you can't have another real one while she is alive. Even if you hated me and Billy, you couldn't get away from us; we'd always be your children; you couldn't change that however much you wished you could, and how is it

different with a wife? Mummie's been with you ever since we have and you wouldn't have had us at all if it hadn't been for her, and it seems to me it all goes together and that you can't cut off Mummie and keep us. Mummie said the other evening when I told her how you cared about Mrs. Brandon at Rest Harrow that we couldn't help caring and perhaps we can't. But even if you feel you have to go away and stay with your paramour, that's no reason why Mummie should stop being your wife. Your loving PHILIPPA

As she sealed this letter, as she found a stamp and ran downstairs quickly and out and across the street to the pillar-box, Philippa seemed to see the writhing strip of black, burnt paper.

CHAPTER X

I'LL always wear white now, in summer, white with pearls and just a breath of black,' thought Cosima Brandon, standing before the gilt mirror over the mantelpiece in her bedroom at the Chinon Hotel. For years she had worn black, knowing it miraculously becoming, seeing it with every year more significantly frame and express her meaning: — solitude; silence; memory; but now her meaning was altered, and from the sorrowing young widow she had become the young bride with only a cloud of past grief, cast over her shoulder, veiling her throat, shadowing her eyes. 'Hats always black,' she thought, 'and the black line on my wrist and not a touch of colour except on the lips. — Cosima, you are lovely — and he thinks you so, and this is far, far more than just being in love; this is marriage; and you are not the silly creature you sound, flown with vanity; you are only a woman happy for the first time in her life. And you adore yourself because the man you love adores you.'

The river flowed outside beyond its bordering trees, full of gentle majesty; the vast French sky arched full of promise; all spoke of enfranchisement

and enrichment, and, if a shadow lurked, it was only that of a harmless enough young figure waiting for her in the wings when she got back to the London stage. When one was as happy as this, one felt that Philippa could be dealt with. 'I'll give her a heavenly time and marry her off when she's eighteen,' she thought; 'only four years to wait; and I'll look even younger then than I do now, for being happy makes one young.'

Aldous sat below on the terrace feeding cake to the white and red cockatoo. Cosima looked down at him unseen. They were going to have a long drive and she had been resting and he would not expect her to be ready so soon. — Her gloves; — her handkerchief; — where had she put her parasol? She had turned from the window to look, when she heard the proprietor's voice below. He had come out with the letters.

Cosima's heart always gave a little check and start when the letters came, because she knew that Aldous's did. Her own letters could easily be faced. Poor old Father had given them his blessing, mingled with a few words of warning. But Aldous, she knew, had not yet heard from his wife, though a fortnight had passed since they had left London. The window curtain hung before her and she could

look down at him without being seen, even if he looked up. It was easier to watch him thus, reading his letters, than when they were side by side, and now she saw that he took up one, quickly, looked for a moment hard at the envelope, as if debating, then tore it open and read. The cockatoo beside him on its stand trod heavily from one foot to the other, expectant of another titbit. The car drew up and paused in the shadow of the trees. Cosima, tranced stood and watched her lover, and, as she stood there, there slid into her mind the memory of the nightmare when the prolonged stare came forth from space and touched her. The letter must be from Philippa and it made Aldous very still. When he had folded it and put it, not only in his pocket but in the little case he carried there, very gently and carefully, when he had opened the other letters and read them, she went down to him.

Aldous sat in the sunlight, and, as she approached, in her dazzling softness, looked up at the woman who now shared his life. She shared it and, for the last fortnight, she had filled it, so overwhelmingly, so sweetly, that the past, except for an undertone of suffering, had been, if not forgotten, blotted out. Now, as he looked at Cosima, he saw her for a moment as a stranger. Who was she, this woman with

the searching eyes, the painted mouth, and why did she smile at him like that? 'Paramour.' The word hovered above him, dark wings extended, and slowly wheeled and slowly sank, to drive its beak into his heart where Philippa's letter lay. So vivid was the picture that, as he sprang up, he felt himself striking back the suffocating pinions. He went forward, smiling. 'A good rest, Cosima?' he asked.

'Delicious,' she smiled back. 'All my rests are delicious now.'

Where had Philippa heard such a word? 'Here's the car,' he said. 'Is your cloak really warm? It gets cool in the evening.' But it was a beautiful word, too. *Par amour*. Could a word be lovelier? Accept it; give one's heart to it, and the beak and talons were transformed softly and magically to a *Romaunt de la Rose* nightingale. *Par amour: ma mie* — no, not quite *ma mie* perhaps. — There was a heady depth of perfume in the word that the eglantine dew of *ma mie* did not distil.

They were in the car now, Cosima's white cheek beside him leaning its great pearl against the white fur collar. He always marvelled a little at her, youthfully; her opulence, so transmuted to charm that it lost all Mammon taint; her soft assurance, as of one whom nothing material in life had ever

hampered; and indifferent to, unaware of material aspects as he was, the magic of travel under these new uncomputing conditions contrasted sharply with memories, bringing their muffled pang, of high, arid little rooms in noisy streets where he and Beth had congratulated themselves on the view of the cathedral towers over chimney-tops. Now the deeply upholstered car, the stalwart liveried back of the chauffeur, Cosima's pearls and furs, and even the red of her lips seen thus in profile, had a sudden strangeness as if he saw them all anew. And they were all he saw. The shining Loire, the springtide green, the sky and sun were blotted out by his sense of strange proximity.

'Of course I belong here, far more than in England,' Cosima was saying, after a silence that she might have found prolonged. — He remembered suddenly that the letter was there in his case between them and that she must not guess at it. 'There can't, I sometimes think, be much Anglo-Saxon blood in my veins. — You are pure Celt in type, Aldous, and the Spanish Armada must account for me. I feel myself melting into harmony when I set foot on the Continent. Aldous — when all is over and accomplished, all the ugly outside things — shan't we stay over here for another year

or so? You'll be able to work much better at your book in Rome than in London.'

'London': what a curious word it was. As she said it, it seemed to toll a bell in his mind and he saw a November day in London, a dark morning in the little house in Kensington when all the blinds were drawn down and Beth lay on her bed: — and Christopher's coffin slid through the sunlight and slanted there between him and Cosima. He felt himself shrink back violently from the memory; as he had at the time shrunken from the reality, striving to hide from Beth that he could not dwell in thought near death. 'That might be a good plan,' he said. He smiled carefully before him, not looking at Cosima. 'Though I don't see Philippa being educated on the Continent.'

'But she could come to us for the holidays, Aldous. You know Beth will probably want to keep her for half the year; but holidays make almost half.' — How strange this familiarity with an unknown woman whom one must call by her Christian name because one could not say: 'Your wife.'

'Holidays? I hardly think it could be managed. I think I'd rather be in England. I could hardly keep in touch with them all if we were abroad; — as it is we can't go back for a year.'

Cosima sat silent. And his mind returned to Philippa's letter. *Par amour:* by love, and by law:— something to that effect he might adapt to her child mind, explaining that one must imply the other and that, if love failed, the law must make shift to alter conditions; love could not be the makeshift. — How far away was Beth! She and Christopher, those dead faces, far away; and he must keep them so if he was to breathe, for it was now Cosima who was near. But closer, far closer, against his heart where her letter lay, he felt his cruel child; one flesh in a sense that no wife, no paramour, could ever be. She was his very self, not sought, but given; his self enhanced by the difference of sex, winged with the future. From the deep organic roots of structure to the spiritual flowers, the same sap flowed in them. When he felt his teeth set edge to edge, he felt Philippa's teeth; she clenched her hands with arms held straightly down, as he did, in moments of controlled emotion; her long stride swung to the rhythm of his limbs and the cool aloofness of her gaze was his, lighted by a mocking smile where his own composed acceptance of irony flickered into mirth. She saw things as he did, she felt things as he did; that was why she could wound him as no one else could, for his own heart set these images before

him and could not disown them or rebel or turn away.

Cosima was very still. How long it was since she had spoken. Poor little Cosima, so unaware of his sudden darkening, all of whose rests were delicious now. The memory of the phrase returned to him and with it he armed himself against Philippa. The child had meant to be cruel. She had measured out her sword thrusts, nicely calculating force and depth. He could deal with cruelty. He was not leaving her — or Beth. He would make her see that; and once more his mind found and formed passionate and careful sentences that would win Philippa back to him.

'Here's Fontevrault,' said Cosima, and he looked up, dazed, at the vast pale edifice. Another car, also opulent, stood before the steps, and, when they entered the cold grey spaces, they found a party there before them, wandering among the tombs of the Plantagenets. It was a family party, and at once it made him think of himself and Beth and Philippa and Billy. There was a tall father with a girl older than Philippa hanging on his arm, a pretty modish mother, fair and dressed in blue, and a son, also fair, of twenty or thereabouts. The rhythms of their speech, soft and caressing, yet falling into emphatic

cadences, showed them to be Americans. They were a happy family, pleased with the world, with Fontevrault, with themselves, and conversant with Europe. And as they drew near it became apparent that Cosima knew them; had met them, years before, in Italy; that they had mutual friends and memories.

'Mrs. Day! How *too* delightful! — Yes, it must be twelve years ago. It was just before the War, wasn't it? Yes, I'm drifting about; a party of us; they've gone to Tours and Mr. Wyntringham has brought me to see Fontevrault.'

Aldous, keeping his hungry eyes on the Day family as they drew near, was realising, as never before, that children made the deep significance of sight-seeing. What did he and Cosima really care for Romanesque architecture or the tombs of the Plantagenets? One must have a mind at once ardent and at peace to care for the past.

'Have you often been in Rome again? Is the Contessa still alive?' Cosima continued. 'I mean the poor darling funny one with the big black eyes and the bunches of children — like bananas,' she said, keeping him, with her pretty languor of tone and extravagances of speech, skilfully in the background and fixing the attention of the Day family upon her lovely self.

'Never again until this year. We've spent the spring there. Challoner was ill and that's why he isn't at Harvard now,' said Mrs. Day. — 'Do you remember Alison who used to love playing with your rings? — and Chal who got lost on the Campagna when his tutor had indigestion? — We've been staying in Tuscany with the Contessa. — If angels are funny, then *she* is. — One really doesn't know until one sees her isolated — with him and the children among the figs and peasants and mountain peaks — what her life is! — He is the *most* unattractive man I ever saw, and the *most* disagreeable! But she is as steady as the prow of an Atlantic liner!'

'Oh, but I remember him! And I was so young at the time that I thought him frightfully attractive! A black, Rochester sort of man — the demon lover with a poker in his hand and burning eyes! Demon lovers always command fidelity, don't they! — I suppose her children are grown up now.'

'Almost. Her eldest girl is coming to us next year, and she and Alison are to have a winter together in New York. Lucia isn't a bit like a banana, is she, Alison? We think she'll make a very lovely American peach.'

Alison, still on her father's arm, was smiling shyly, from between thick, smooth braids of hair, at

the lovely lady of her childhood; Chal, somewhat in the background, loitered near the tombs of the Plantagenets. They were endearing people, poignant, too, to Aldous's heart, and as innocent, it somehow seemed to him for all their equipment, as a nest of young birds, though Mrs. Day, crystal-gay and voluble, a happy fountain throwing up its foam, took care of their innocence. Resource rather than naïveté was in her speech, and, while making the occasion as pleasant as possible, Aldous felt that she had intuitions and intentions in which her family had no need to partake; she would do it all for them, and she went on now, her fountain playing with the pebble and casting it forth — 'She'd be faithful if he were an angel too. — She's the sort of rock on which civilisations are built.'

Chal looked and listened from his distance, and his demeanour, rather than his fair good looks, caught Aldous's attention. He was of an age to feel to the full the charm that emanated from Cosima's transparent hovering form; yet in the firm sweet gaze the young man bent upon her Aldous discerned no admiration.

'That cherub of a Daisy Brock is always begging me to go over and hunt in Virginia,' Cosima was saying. 'I suppose *her* children are growing up now

into peaches and coming out. They're frightfully gay, your young, aren't they? and put ours in the shade. Does Alison like dances or Plantagenets best? — Isn't Plantagenet a marvellous word?' she smiled at Alison. 'How it conquers poor little flat green England!'

'Have you a choice, Alison?' Mrs. Day asked, and Alison said very gaily and confidently that she liked Plantagenets best if one could get them in beautiful places like this.

'They're adoring it all,' said Mrs. Day. 'They were too young last time really to take it in. We are rather scampering through France and sail on Saturday from Cherbourg; — so we must be off.'

As Chal now approached for the farewells, Aldous saw that Cosima had been aware of his defection. 'I remember that day when you were lost on the Campagna,' she said. — 'What was it you ran off to see by yourself?'

'I forget,' Chal smiled, bending slightly over her hand, a touch of French formality in his good manners. 'I think it was just to get away from the tutor with indigestion.'

'I don't!' said Cosima, and in the transparent shadow of her hat her eyes and pearls and smile hovered over the boy languidly, sweetly, capri-

ciously; 'I think you'd gone to look for butterflies — those lovely white butterflies — swallowtails, do you call them? — freaked with black.' She was like that butterfly herself — and did she not know it?

But Chal, blushing a little, a little confused, but quite unconquered, owned: 'Well, I don't believe I'm much good at European butterflies. — I'm afraid it was only the tutor.'

When they were gone and the sound of their motor had died away, the vast precincts seemed still more cold and silent and the Plantagenets more deeply sleeping in their solitude. Cosima, saying nothing, drifted here and there for a few moments, and then, murmuring that she had seen enough, moved towards the entrance. 'Such a crashing bore, that good lady,' she commented. The car waited in the shade and she stood for it to approach.

'Is she? They all seemed to me particularly charming,' said Aldous. 'Did you see much of them in Rome?'

'Not much. I'd just left Eustace and was frightfully miserable, and until she found out why I was drifting about alone she was quite nice and friendly. — But afterwards she rather *receded!* — Americans of that type do. — There's nothing they are so terrified of as domestic unconventionality. — In-

capable of an original thought and clinging closely to their virtuous contessas, you may be sure!'

They were in the car again, and the sense of pity with which he had watched her little failure was shifting to a sense of irritation. 'Wasn't it slightly risky to present us as separated, Cosima?' he asked.

'What else was there to do?' She spoke with a sudden sulkiness, pulling at the silken blind where the sun came in.

'Well — if they'd been going on to our hotel, for instance — and found us there — as Mr. and Mrs. Wyntringham.'

She said nothing for a moment, keeping a half-sulky, half-startled silence, and he remembered that from her past of hidden loves skill and evasion would come easily to Cosima. 'If I'd known they were sailing on Saturday — tiresome creatures — I *would* have been married — though I don't suppose we can be for a year and Daisy Brock might have given *that* away! She knows them, and is sure to find out and follow dates. — Not that New York matters much, or Virginia either. — We *are* to be married in a year's time, I suppose?'

'I hope so.' The tone in which he spoke revealed to her, perhaps, the deep distaste he felt for his present situation.

'You've heard nothing yet?' she questioned.

'I've heard from my solicitors,' said Aldous, after a moment, aware of an accusation in the darkness of her tone. 'They had seen Beth and will communicate with me later.'

'Our respectability is to be indefinitely adjourned, you mean? I'll have to go on telling the fibs that distress you so, indefinitely?'

'Not indefinitely. You must give people time to adjust their minds.'

'Have I denied them time? It's you who so crave respectability, isn't it?'

To this he made no reply. He understood her, and was sorry for her, but this silence, into which her caustic words drove him, was all that he craved. Once more his mind could return to Philippa and to her letter. That child hanging on her father's arm, smiling up at him, had deeply cut into his menaced heart. It was, of course, unthinkable that he should lose Philippa.

When they reached Chinon, it was not yet seven, but Cosima said they would dine at once, and they went to their own table in the window, where flowers stood and the bottle of Vouvray that she liked. The waiter poured her out a glass, but she did not drink, toying with her fish. Her eyes were heavy, spilling

their darkness over her face as if from unshed tears, and her mouth, like the mouth of a child about to cry, dragged at the corners. Glancing at her with the austerity that emotion evoked from him, Aldous saw her, her beauty blurred, as near again; terribly near; one flesh. All this childish induced grief would have to wreak itself upon him, wear itself out upon him, pass through him, before they could have peace. This was the dark, the dangerous river upon which he had embarked. And far away was the dawn, the blessed dusty road, and Beth. And, remembering of Beth only her gentleness and self-command, a sense of resistance and resentment armed him against the approaching storm. He would not yield to it. She must learn what it was to have a husband, as well as a lover.

Suddenly she rose. 'I'm tired. I'm ill,' she said. 'I'm going to bed.' He lifted her cloak politely from the back of the chair and set aside his to let her pass. 'You will come up?' she said, passing.

'Presently. When I have dined and smoked.'

'Don't hurry — I pray,' she muttered, and he saw the tears overflow her lids. The waiter's eyes followed her discreetly as she went. Aldous, resuming his seat, caught the expression on the fellow's face. They were accustomed, these French waiters,

to such couples as him and Cosima. They were accustomed to paramours. The word brought a sudden flush to his cheek, a sense of self-accusation and shame. He had dragged her to it. Poor child. And Philippa's letter that lay like a hot coal against his heart was an insult to her, justifying her anger, could she have guessed at it. He would not punish her. He would not smoke. He finished his dinner and went up, pausing in the little salon that led into their bedroom, to listen. There was no sound beyond the open door. Cosima was already in bed. He entered and saw her lying there, on her side, her hair half-covering her face, her eyes bitterly closed on the tears that wetted her cheeks, and all his alienation melted to a sense of bitter unity. 'How do you feel, darling?' he said, bending over her. For a moment she did not move or speak. Then suddenly, lifting her hands to cover her face, she broke into convulsive sobbing.

'Cosima; — darling; — don't cry like that.' — He was aghast at the violence of her grief. 'Have I been unkind?'

'Yes! Yes! — You have been unkind!' she gasped from behind her hands. — 'You have forgotten me — or disliked me — all the afternoon — because of Philippa!'

Transfixed, he remained bending over her. 'Because of Philippa? What do you mean?'

'Don't deny it! Because I know!' she cried. 'You try to hide from me — but I know. She's written to you! The letter came before we started. I saw you read it.'

Now he understood. Now he understood everything, and that her grief was not merely childishness and that he must pick his way. For a moment longer he stood silent. Then, raising himself, he said: 'I have heard from Philippa; that's true; and it has upset me somewhat. But I've not forgotten or disliked you.'

'You have! You have! — She's hurt you so that it makes you hate me! Do you think I'm blind? — She's been in your mind all the afternoon!'

'Cosima, I beg of you.' — Her sobs had risen to hysteric cries. 'People will hear you.'

'Why should I care for people? — It's you who care for people! — I have put them behind me, for ever, because of you! Why should I care what people think!'

He stood and thought for a moment longer, then sat down beside her and put his hand on her shoulder, as she lay turned from him, trying to soothe her. 'I wrote to her and she answered me. The

child has had a horrible shock. You must understand that. It will all come right when I've written to her; when I've seen her. Don't tear yourself — and me — to pieces like this.'

She stilled her breath to listen. Then she said in a curiously quiet voice: 'Will you show it to me?'

'Show it to you?'

'Yes. It's about me. I know it's about me. — Aldous' — she turned to him, raising herself on her arm and pushing back her hair — 'you must show it to me. It will kill me unless I see it.'

He looked at her, striving not to shrink too openly from an emotion that repelled him even while he pitied it. 'I can't do that,' he said. 'That's impossible. You have nothing to do with my relation to my child.'

'Nothing to do!' She seized his arm and her fingers fixed themselves deeply into his flesh. 'Nothing to do! — When you've put her in my life from the beginning! — When from the very beginning you've done nothing but thrust and thrust her at me — and your love for her! — Even in the midst of everything most sacredly ours — your plan was at once that she should live with us! — You didn't ask me or care for what I felt — you took it all for

granted! You wouldn't have dared love me at all — or ask me to come away — if you had dreamed it might part you from her!'

It was the truth. He had not known it, but looking at her, darkly now, he saw that it was the truth and remembered the scene like this with Beth. He had been unfair to Beth, horribly, cruelly unfair; — his mind groped for the phrase in Philippa's letter that had enlightened him; — and dimly the surmise came, bewildering him with a sense of toils laid by his own blindness, that it was often so with women's cruel unreason; they were cruel because they did not dare openly reveal to the man who had failed them, how deeply he had wounded.

'I could not have given her up even for your sake,' he said. 'I hoped to keep you both. I still hope to keep you both.' He looked away from her. 'This is all exaggeration: extravagance.'

'Keep us both! It's only her you keep if you shut me out! Oh, Aldous! ——' her head sank upon her arm, she fell against him, again bitterly weeping: 'Oh, Aldous — don't you see — she's taken you from me already. — Happiness wouldn't separate us, but unhappiness does and she's made you miserable. — Won't you share it with me? I'm shut out unless you share it. — Oh, darling, show me that

you can trust me to understand! I've accepted Philippa and I've given you all my life!'

Still looking away from her, over her head, out of the window, he had put his arms round her and sat on the edge of the bed beside her, trying to think, trying to detach his mind from the clogging fumes of doubt and pity and desire; — for it was detestable to feel the flame she kindled creep through him at a moment of such spiritual alienation. It was the truth she spoke and it had been the truth that Beth had spoken. He had been blind to Beth's suffering, and to Cosima's. Why not trust her insight, since his own had proved at fault? If she were brave enough to understand and accept — any shared hurt was better than this recognised division. — Disengaging his hand, he took out the case, drew the letter from it, and handed it to her. She sat forward, pushing back her hair and drawing a hand across her eyes to clear away the tears; and he sat and watched her read, feeling the blood stop in her veins, as it had in his, and then flow feebly on. When she had reached the end, her eyes met his in a wavering glance, and then, her hand falling with the letter on the sheet, she sank back and closed her eyes.

'You see, Cosima, when I write to her, when I

make it clear to her, it will be all right,' said Aldous. He still sat on the edge of the bed, but took his elbow now in his hand, leaned his cheek on his clenched fist and looked down at the ground. 'She doesn't understand. — It's painful, of course; but we mustn't take it too much to heart.'

'She does understand,' said Cosima.

'Don't make me, already, regret that I showed it to you. She's only a child and she's had a shock.'

'She does understand. What she says is true. I am your paramour.'

Now his eyes turned to her. 'No, my poor darling. — It's a word she's picked up in her reading, not knowing what it means. Cosima' — he put out his hand and took hers — 'it's just what you're not to be; just what I will not have you be. Don't brood over it.'

But she would not look at him. 'I hear your wife saying it: "Your father's paramour." — Your wife understood when she said it; — meaning it to be a word of insult; a word of shame; — and meant the child to understand.'

'Beth never said it.'

'Who else, then?'

'I don't know who else. Beth never would have said it or thought it. — And you are to be my wife.'

'If your wife consents. But, as your child advises, she may well prefer to keep me a paramour. — What purity! What ineffability! She can't even think, you say, of such abominations as love without marriage! — One flesh! — Your child has heard strange talk. — A man should be tied all his life to his first mistress if the flesh is to be the test!' Wildly and bitterly she laughed. 'Oh, these immaculate ones! — How well I understand them!'

He lifted his hand from hers now. He folded his arms and sat silent, withdrawing himself from her malice. And, feeling this knife of severance descend, she lay very still, her eyes shut, her breast rising and falling in deep breaths. Then, suddenly, she turned to him. 'Aldous,' she whispered, seeking him.

'Yes' — he leaned to her.

'Forgive me. — Understand.'

'Yes. — I understand. — Poor child.' He laid his hand on her hair and smoothed it back, looking his pity into her wild appealing eyes.

'Aldous — she frightens me so,' she said.

'Little Philippa? No, Cosima. That is hysteria.'

'Frightens me horribly,' she went on, and the sincerity of her gaze held him. 'Not when she's there. — I don't feel it when she's there. I was fond of her; and I think she was fond of me. — But when

she's not there. Aldous, I had such a dreadful nightmare that night I came to you. That was why I came; — because I was so frightened. It was about her.'

'About Philippa?'

'Yes. In her blue coat. It must have been Philippa. — I can't describe it. — One can't describe nightmares, or why they should be horrible. — It was a gaze fixed on me from very far away — her gaze. — As if it reached out and touched me. It was as if I'd seen her before in that blue coat.'

A cool little current of fear was running over Aldous, as he also remembered something from very far away. 'I can explain that nightmare,' he said after a moment.

'Explain it?'

'Yes. Exorcise it. Poor child, poor foolish child. — She did see you. She did look at you. At the concert we went to, that day we wired to her to join us at Victoria. She and Beth were there and saw us.'

Cosima lay still in his arms. Then she drew herself away and sat upright. 'They were there?'

'Yes.' He did not know why her eyes should confuse him, yet meeting their gaze he blushed.

'You didn't know it. — I didn't know it — and they were there and watched us?'

He looked away. 'They saw us. Beth told me that Philippa was rather upset.'

'Beth told you! Upset! Why upset?'

'I don't know why.'

Still she gazed at him and he did not meet her eyes.

'It's horrible; horrible,' she said.

'Don't be absurd, Cosima.'

'Horrible,' she repeated. 'Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't your wife tell me, that day she came?'

'What was there to tell?'

'What was there to keep back? Why did she not speak of it — if they felt it natural?'

'They wouldn't feel it quite natural,' said Aldous after a moment, reliving the past — Beth's past; — 'to see me there, so intimately, with someone they didn't know.'

'What do you mean by intimately? We were friends who happened to go to a concert together. Does your wife think a man should only appear in public with his legal mate?'

'We were intimate,' said Aldous, an icy repudiation in his voice, 'because we were in love, and that, no doubt, is what they discerned; little as we were aware of betraying ourselves.'

'You mean' — the flame of her voice struck at the ice in his — 'that you justify them? You mean that we were in some way guilty!'

'Not in any sense guilty; but unfortunate, — as we still are, as lovers must be, when they must hide their love.'

And, as she lay there, rigid on her pillow, as he sat and looked away from her, there crept over him a colder current — fear or hope? Was this, already, a final parting? Was his passionate interlude over so soon? Would Cosima turn from him, feeling his heart unsevered from his past? And was he to be free to return to it and to Philippa? Hope or fear, he did not know; only he was sick and cold, and long moments seemed to pass before he heard her voice; low, broken, pitiful. 'Aldous, don't you love me?' She was sobbing now with the sobs of an exhausted child and the poor little ravaged face was a child's face. Saying nothing, he took her in his arms and held her close. 'I couldn't help loving you. Was it wrong?'

'My darling ——'

'I loved you and you took me away. — Was it my fault?'

'Cosima darling, don't cry like this. If there was any fault it was mine. Mine were the ties to break,

and I broke them because I love you. — Darling — this is why you are so pale and thin and ill — you wear yourself out with these agonies. You know that I love you. You know that I don't think it your fault. Now; is my foolish child quieter? Where are those drops you take? You must try to be quiet. You must sleep.'

'In your arms. — Only in your arms. — Everything shut out,' she murmured. — But she faintly motioned with her hand, and, when he had measured out the dose, raised herself obediently on his arm to drink from the glass he brought. — 'It's always the same, always the same,' he heard her murmuring as she sank down again.

'Yes; I love you and it's the same. — Shut those dear eyes. — Why, Cosima, the lids are like passion-flowers.'

'No, I don't mean that,' she murmured, obedient, with closed eyes and folded hands. 'I mean the old thing. — Every happiness I try to take — has blood on it.'

PART III

CHAPTER I

PHILIPPA at fourteen had been tall for her years, and at sixteen, though hardly taller, she was so slender that it was still the *bleu horizon* coat she wore as she slowly walked down a certain glade in Kensington Gardens — on a September afternoon. This was the third time in the last ten days that she had walked here, taking counsel with herself; for her father had at last returned to London, and Kensington Gardens had always been their favourite refuge and this glade their favourite walk. Hardly anyone ever came there. The murmur of traffic seemed as far, yet as near, as the calls of evening rooks might seem in the trees of a country rectory. A couple sometimes sat under one of the large-girthed trees, or a nurse and a child passed along the paths that cut across its green vista, but it was so solitary that they had always counted it with security as their very own; and one special tree, freaked in spring along its blackened bole with tiny leaves, they always called Ygdrasil. — It was their secret tree, their tree of destiny. In any difficulty or delight they came and sat under it.

She had told him here, long ago, about the little girl at school she hated so and struck one day. Daddy had understood that wickedness, when no one else would have; — the sneering lip, the horrid green dress with art embroidery round its edges that had incensed her. Here Daddy had read 'Sohrab and Rustum' to her and 'Henry the Fourth' and 'The Ode to Autumn,' and here on a November afternoon they had come to sit in silence after Christopher's funeral. This tree, this glade, had been more deeply in her life than any other place on earth, and when she thought of home it was Kensington Gardens she saw first. — The Round Pond where she and Christopher had sailed their boats; the Dutch Garden where they had played hide-and-seek; and, furthest back of all, the blossoming double-cherry above her head that had first made her baby eyes aware of beauty, as she sat marooned in her perambulator beside her knitting nurse in the Flower Walk. It was natural that she should escape from Mummie and Billy and the little house in Kensington to come here and think all alone about Daddy, now that he had returned and that she must decide whether she was to see him again.

They had written — written and written, of

course; he with careful urgency, she with crisp kindliness, keeping him at his distance. But, with Grannie as ally, she had wafted her family off to Cornwall during the week he spent in London a year ago, hoping for reconciliation. He was not then married, and there was still hope, for he must understand the threat applied, the reward held out: — 'Give her up and you have me back. — Come home to us, and you will find me.' She knew that her refusal to see him had cruelly hurt him and that her mother had marvelled at her ruthlessness; but all her strategy had been of no avail. He had married Cosima Brandon and his marriage wore the colour of success.

'We met a lovely Mrs. Wyntringham in Capri,' Jennifer Harding said last spring. (Philippa went to boarding-school now and Jennifer was a new friend.) — 'Is she a relation of yours, I wonder? She was awfully delicate and lay under the orange-trees, in white, with everybody adoring her. I never saw anyone dress so marvellously. Her husband seemed rather old and stiff for her; he was always writing; a book on relativity or something. Do you know them?'

'He is my father,' Philippa had said calmly. 'And she is his second wife.' Of course everybody

knew that her mother had divorced her father; but that was all the new friends did know and poor Jennifer became crimson with confusion. Capri must have seemed so safely far away from Kensington. — 'Oh, my dear — how tiresome for you! I'm so *frightfully* sorry!' And Philippa had said: 'Never mind. It can't be helped. It will always be happening, I suppose, and I must get used to it. — Yes, the lovely Mrs. Wyntringham *is* a relation, if you can call your father's second wife, when his first is alive, a relation.'

There it was. They were married and he was not punished. His lovely wife lay under the orange-trees and people thought Daddy old and stiff. How could anybody think Daddy old and stiff? He must have been very unhappy if he had looked like that — and perhaps that was his punishment. Cosima had lain as long as she could under the orange-trees, pretending to be ill; but now that they had come back at last and were there, in Hyde Park Square, just over the Park, he had written and she had heard his voice on the telephone that morning. — What was she to do? 'Just as you like, darling,' poor Mummie had said. 'You must do exactly as you feel best. — But it seems to me that you ought to see your father.' How terrible it was, Philippa

had thought, standing there in the drawing-room while Mummie bent over her committee papers, how terrible to hear her say 'your father' as if he had never been her husband. How easy it might all have been if she had been much younger and had remained unaware of her mother's deadly wound; and as she thought now of her mother, sitting there in the shabbier and shabbier little drawing-room (for she and Billy and their schools cost so much) bent over her committee papers, writing notes about the poor, day and night — Philippa's heart sank lower and lower and she despised herself for her own fear and shrinking. It was as if Mummie had become a pitiful shade, that Cosima Brandon's beams drove further and further away. She saw Mummie sinking into the darkness and herself involved in her obscurity. Mummie had nothing to master and enchant the world with; she could only serve it. She was like a little crippled animal rustling back among the leaves lest it be trod upon, hiding among the leaves — Philippa kicked them up before her as she went — only its bright, frightened eyes visible. She would never get over being frightened now, and if you were frightened nothing ever came to you. — 'To him that hath shall be given,' thought Philippa, 'and from him that hath

not shall be taken away.' That was the pitiless world and she herself was part of it, feeling herself shrink away from her mother's shadow even while she pitied her.

She lifted her head. Down there, at the far end of the glade, under the dusty green of the September branches, a tall grey figure was approaching her; and, as she saw him, as her eyes constructed from faintest indication his intent wandering air, she knew that it was her father and why he had come just there and why she had come. How often already had he walked in their glade hoping to find her?

At first, as she watched him, it was as if she had seen him last only a week ago, she with a wreath and a wicked fairy smile; they were as near as that; all between had been strategy. But no; they were nearer; for already in that farewell on the stairs their unity had been deeply flawed, and now it was as if she had seen him last when they had sat under Ygdrasil together, Cosima Brandon's name as yet unspoken. She did not hold out her arms, nor did he. Keeping their eyes on each other as they approached, they both smiled faintly, and in both faces, the young and the mature, was a look of strange fatigue as though they met after a long and jading day.

'Well, darling,' she heard him say. His face was changed, leaner, longer, with lines running down the cheeks. Was he very tired? Was he shy? Was he so unhappy that he did not dare speak seriously lest he should break down — and she felt the hotness and tightness in her own throat. They held each other's hands and looked at each other and he said: 'You've cut your hair.' Then he kissed her.

It had all been a dream, Philippa thought, all a bad dream; of course she did not hate him and of course he loved her better than anything else in the world — just as Mummie had said. He had been bewitched and Cosima Brandon was a brittle whiff of burnt black paper. He asked no question and made no appeal. The time for all that was over since now they were together. He only drew her hand within his arm, keeping his own hand tightly over it, and walked beside her, looking first down at the ground and then up at her, again and again, as if committing her altered young face to memory.

'How do you like it?' said Philippa. Her throat was still dry and the edges of her eyelids smarted. She pulled off her little blue hat. Her hair was cut, short and thick, smooth from the sharp point on her forehead to the blunt point on her neck, leaving her small ears uncovered. Thus disclosed, her face was

crisp and clear and fresh as a shell or a hawthorn bud, tinted with cold rose on lips and cheeks and eartips. She was intoxicatingly young, like a dewy branch of hawthorn, and cold and remote as the water of a rocky pool on an unvisited beach. Her father gazed at her, his aching heart in his eyes.

'But your hair was beautiful,' he said presently. 'No one had such hair.'

'I've still got it, you know. It's all there when I want it back.' Her voice trembled a little, but she smiled at him.

'It would take years to grow, wouldn't it?'

'By the time I'm grown up it could be long again.'

'In two years' time? Hardly below your waist?'

'Do you call eighteen grown up? I meant of age; not for five years. — But,' she thought, glancing at his downward face, 'what he is thinking is that at eighteen I shall be old enough to marry and leave him. I'll never marry, Daddy darling,' she thought, 'if you love me most. — No one will ever care about my hair as you do. — How's the book getting on?' she asked, and she fixed upon the one experience in the eighteen months of their separation about which she could ask.

'What do you know about the book?'

'I knew about it before anyone else, didn't I? — Up on the Downs. — I always think it's really about plovers! — though I know it's atoms. — Is it getting on?'

'Yes. But I'm afraid it's rather too late.'

'How do you mean too late?'

'I'm too late, I mean. — I ought to have started sooner. The atoms have got too far ahead of me.'

How tired he looked! That new line in his cheek; those pinches under his eyes; the shadow under his cheekbone. 'But it's rather clever,' he said, 'just on that point of plovers, as it were. It connects plovers and atoms as more sober thinkers haven't yet done. So it will, I believe, be a success, and make me rather ridiculous in the eyes of sober thinkers.'

He talked to her as if she knew as much as he did. He always had. And Philippa had always felt that she understood. They saw the world through each other's eyes, glancing from it back at each other for enhancement and corroboration. Nothing in life was so delicious as this sharing impressions with Daddy. 'I shan't mind their finding you ridiculous,' she said. 'You aren't really writing for them — the people who know more about atoms, are you? — but for the people who know more about plovers.

Why do the atoms in a plover make it take just those loops in the sky? And why does a skylark circle round and round until he's got as high as he means to go? That's what we really want to understand.'

'Precisely. And why your atoms make your hair grow in those eddies on your forehead. — But who told you about my book?'

'A girl at school. Jennifer Harding. She met you at Capri; — do you remember her? — A pretty girl with a gap between her front teeth.'

He flushed a little, taken aback by the unexpected link. 'Yes. I remember her. A pretty girl fond of hunting.'

'Adores it. — All the girls I know now seem to hunt and dance and travel. I'm rather a Cinderella among them.'

'You can hunt, you know, if you want to,' he said after a moment. 'Will you ride with me in Richmond Park, Philippa?'

She paused. 'Yes. I'd love to. In Richmond Park.' (How could she hunt? Unless at Rest Harrow, with Cosima Brandon's money. — But he had taken it back.)

'Your mother has told me how much you like your school,' he said, and now he was trying some-

thing else. 'What does she do without you and Billy?' he asked suddenly, with a change of tone.

'I'm afraid she *is* rather lonely.' Philippa still pressed his arm and looked quietly into his eyes. 'But she keeps busy with all her charities and things.'

'She sees her friends, the Wedderburns? The Fairholmes? She goes out?'

'Not much, Daddy. She works so hard all day, sitting on committees and keeping accounts for charities and interviewing unfortunate people, that she's pretty tired at night. — She's a sort of modern nun. I always think that people who do all the charities nowadays are like that; nuns without the satisfaction of an interesting costume — and rosaries to keep them going. — Mummie would look lovely in a Saint Vincent de Paul *coiffe*, wouldn't she?'

'Yes. I think she would. Only she's not at all like a nun.'

'No. They give up things — and things have given her up.' Philippa could not for the life of her repress it. It was cruel and she said it to hurt him whom she loved; but loyalty to the one she loved less brought it inevitably to her lips. 'There's not so much satisfaction in that, is there?' she said.

'I meant that she was lovelier than any nun,' he said after a moment, gently and humbly. 'She's such a mother. It's maternity that makes her take care of people. Not religion.'

'I expect it's maternity with nuns, too,' said Philippa, 'and that religion is part of it. Perhaps you can't separate maternity and religion, Daddy. — Our school is rather religious; it seems to go with hunting. But I said I couldn't get confirmed yet. You must be able to care about God if you get confirmed and I seem only able to care about people. You're like that, too, aren't you? — You and I are both rather pagans, I think. Perhaps you'll be able to connect God with atoms and convert us both.' She was rattling on a little and he would know why; it was to carry them past the hurting moment. She had had to hurt him, but now they could escape it. 'Do you remember the old balloon woman who used to sit at the gate over there?' she said; 'and how, when I was quite small, you bought me all her bunch one day and I was almost demented with joy carrying them home; — frightened, too, for fear they should float up and carry me away into the sky; they jostled over my head and shoulders every sort of colour, and it was like walking in a dream. — Mummie saw us from the drawing-room window

and came running out to meet us and we had them in the drawing-room at tea. They bumped against the nursery ceiling for ages, and we went to sleep under them, Christopher and I. He loved them, and I used to wake early in the morning and see him lying there staring up at them. — What a darling face he had! — He was quite tiny then, not more than six or seven, I suppose, and I can't have been more than four.' And now, suddenly, that dryness in her throat again assailed her and the smarting on her eyelids and she felt for a moment that she must break down and cry; for had he not lost Christopher too? He had doubly lost him. If you were a faithless father, a dead child did not belong to you. Christopher was Mummie's; only Mummie's. And she did not look round at her father. He put his hand on hers again and held it tightly as they walked.

'You won't leave me, will you, Philippa?' he said after a silence. 'I know what you think about me. I accept it. I accept any conditions you make for me — it's you who make conditions, I know that; I know that your mother makes none.'

'But that's because she doesn't see you. She doesn't need conditions,' Philippa forced her voice to remind him.

'She makes none for you is what I mean.'

'I can't leave her. I can't go and live with you, Daddy.'

'Can't you spend your holidays with me? That would be fair.'

'That would be living with you — since I go away to school now.' The name between them was still unuttered. She would not speak it and she knew that he could not.

'But you'll come to me, you and Billy will come sometimes. To the play, perhaps, or the Zoo, or out to tea. Perhaps your mother will let me come to you. I must be in your life, Philippa. You must be in mine. — You and I might go away for a week now and then, don't you think, in your holidays?'

She pondered intently, looking down. 'I don't think you can come to us; not yet; that would hurt her too much. But yes, we could go to you sometimes, to the play or Zoo; — I don't know about the holidays. I should have to think about that; but I should love to ride in Richmond Park,' she said.

'Yes. Yes; — very well,' Aldous muttered. Her restrictions and definitions cut, she knew, into his flesh.

'Let's go and sit under Ygdrasil,' she said, turn-

ing him round, their arms still linked. 'Let's go and just look quietly at each other, Daddy. — That will be really enough for to-day, won't it. — Don't let us try to think too much. — You'll always go on wearing blue and grey, won't you?'

Two dogs raced across their way, a Cairn and an Alsatian at play; their tongues hung sideways; their eyes were bright and watchful. 'Here, Jack! Here, Dominic!' called a clear voice, a voice infusing an odd affectionateness into the call. A young man and girl stood near by calling back their dogs, and Philippa, glancing towards them, saw that their eyes were fixed in what seemed recognition on her father. The girl was dressed as she would like to dress; better even than Jennifer. The young man, who was tall and fair, had the affectionate voice, and his eyes, turning from her father to her, seemed, while cool and courteous, to express a fundamental good-will towards the world in general. He lifted his hat, slightly and shyly smiling as their paths crossed, and Philippa looking back found that he, too, was looking back at them.

'Who is that, Daddy?' she asked.

Her father, though he had raised an absent hand, had hardly seen them. He brooded intently on her conditions and restrictions. — 'I think his name is

Chal; an American,' he said. — 'He was lost on the Campagna. But, you *will* ride to-morrow, won't you, darling — and every day till your holidays are over?'

CHAPTER II

IF YOU had taken my advice at the beginning, this could never have happened; you see that now, don't you, Beth?' said Mrs. Oliffe. She sat before the fire on the last day of Philippa's Christmas holidays, her delicate hands, glazed and wrinkled by age for all her care, held out to the flames; and these hands expressed to Beth, who kept her eyes upon them so that she need not meet her mother's condemnatory eyes, the pitiful ravage wrought in her by the disasters that had befallen them. She herself was ravaged — less dramatically, for she found herself merely uglier; but the fire of her mother's vicarious resentment had wasted her features to ashen fragility, hollowed her cheek and throat and drained her lips of blood, and her hands, reduced to the barest necessities of structure, tended to tremble unless held tensely, as now. Beth was often sick with pity for her; yet, though her own frailty shrank from the impact of her indignation, she seemed not to fear her any longer. Her life held now no tarnishable treasure.

'You mean, she wouldn't have gone to him

again?' she questioned, and she knew that her quietness exasperated her mother, yet could not help being quiet. 'I don't see that, Mother.'

'You don't see anything, my poor Beth,' Mrs. Oliffe returned. 'You never did. You are like your father in that — as in so many things. He had an extraordinary capacity for walking blindfold into the ditch and sitting down in it uncomplainingly. — She wouldn't have gone to him again because he wouldn't have been there to go to. — A man skulking on the Riviera with a mistress isn't "there." That's just my point.'

'Do people skulk nowadays — even if they're not married? If they do,' said Beth, trying to be clear, 'I can't help being glad that I set them free. I should have been too miserable thinking about them. That was all there was to it.'

'Yes. That was all there was to it; as I know too well. Your helpless tender-heartedness; it's almost discreditable to be so tender-hearted. A firmer heart would have looked further ahead and thought of the child's future rather than the father's conveniences. — I don't mean to be unkind, my poor Beth.'

'I know you don't, Mother.'

'Facts must be faced. We are faced by the fact

that your former husband and your child can't be kept apart.'

It was the fact, Beth knew, and she knew that she had faced nothing else for the last four months, seeing her last hope, drop by drop, drained from her. It had been strange to realise, since Aldous had gone away, how her dispossessed heart had crept out to all that was left of him in Philippa. Philippa embodied all the strangeness that had caught it, so many years ago, to Aldous and held it to him, trembling, tormented, and enchanted; and when the child's fierce loyalty had declared itself — founded though she knew it to be on fierce resentment — she had allowed herself to build on it. She could never possess Philippa as she possessed Billy; but it was her presence she craved, enchanting, enhancing, enthralling. And Philippa and Aldous had spent a week together in Switzerland during these Christmas holidays, and to-day, her last at home, she was riding with him in Richmond Park. — How could she have refused when Philippa, with shining eyes, had said: 'You don't mind, do you, Mummie? — You and I will have our evening together.' How could she say no to anything when from the first she had told Philippa that her father loved her best and that she must love him back?

'You know, Mother,' she said now, looking away from her mother's hands and out at the grey afternoon, 'I always gave them perfect freedom to do as they felt best about their father. Billy doesn't want to see him — poor darling — but that's because he's never been as near him as Philippa. She believed that she would never want to see him, but when they met, by chance that time in the Park, she knew that she had to forgive him. She told me so when she came back.'

'By chance!' Mrs. Oliffe echoed. 'I always told you I disapproved of Philippa walking there alone. They went, both of them, in the hope of meeting.'

'Well, if they did, it was that way or another. They were bound to meet once he had come back.'

'Most certainly they were. — Since you enabled him to establish himself on the crest of the wave in London. That is what you've done, Beth, and my blood boils when I think of it. Aldous and his lady-love come back, and far from being ostracised they are received with open arms. It's scandalous!' said Mrs. Oliffe, while her nostrils contracted and grew white. 'It's brazen! Evelyn Merton told me that when she took her girls to the Basinghams' dance, there, actually, was Cosima Brandon dressed more beautifully than anyone else in the room, and

— dancing more beautifully. And Lady Basingham said to her: "We're all broader nowadays, aren't we, and she's been so courageous and his marriage was perfectly wretched."' — Mrs. Oliffe, as she spoke these words, grew whiter, casting a glance of desperate self-reproach upon her daughter.

Beth, too, grew pale. She said nothing.

'The comical thing is,' Mrs. Oliffe went on, hastening from her own irrepressible unkindness, 'that Evelyn Merton, for all her sacrosanct standards, is feeling altered herself towards Cosima Brandon since she saw her at the Basinghams'! She spoke of her with a sort of cautious condonation. She would never invite her to the country, but I should not be surprised if she did invite her to her London dances! It's a barefaced world, my dear, or, rather, I wish it were. I'd like it better bare.'

Beth hardly heard her. Her mind was dwelling on those cruel words: a wretched marriage. Was it possible that she had lived all those years in a fools' paradise? Had Aldous been wretched with her? And, as a beggar glances from the darkness of a winter street in at an illumined altar, her mind glanced back to a shining memory when Aldous, though already he loved Cosima Brandon, had held her and said: 'You are my dear wife.'

'It's one of the penalities of obscurity,' Mrs. Oliffe went on, 'to be the one who's always in the wrong. — Of course I don't for a moment believe that Aldous ever said such a thing about your marriage. But no doubt she has. — You are sure that Philippa has never met that woman yet?'

'Quite sure, Mother.'

'Well, I predict that they will meet before many months are over. Cosima Brandon will see to it that they do. The child's relation with her father puts her in an invidious position and she as well as Aldous will be plotting to get her openly installed. To have Philippa living with her would consolidate her position as nothing else would.'

Beth sat silent, a sick fear creeping round her heart. That Aldous should take her child and his from her was one thing; that Cosima Brandon should take her was another. And as they sat thus, silent, a ring at the bell, swift footsteps on the stair, announced the return of Philippa.

Exclaiming at the darkness, laughing with a certain artificiality, she entered, and as she turned up the light with gay authority, it revealed an altered room. Philippa was only sixteen, but her mature security of taste was already imposing itself on her surroundings. 'I simply can't stand pink

cushions, Mother!' she had exclaimed, 'nor pink and white and green chintz either!' Beth had never bought those new chintzes of which she had spoken on the evening of her call on Mrs. Brandon and the old ones had indeed been shabby, so that when Aldous's return put money at her disposal, Philippa was justified in waving her wand. 'We'll build up to the Chinese picture,' she had said; '*do* leave it to me, Mummie! — I know what you like far better than you do!' And Beth had indeed enjoyed the child's prowess as they went thriftily, carefully, from shop to shop, matching and computing; and now, though perhaps a little haphazard, the room declared itself as fresh and cool and crisp; pearl-grey and citron-yellow with flicks of azalea green, and all the cushions black. 'You mustn't leave your darning lying about now, Mummie!' Philippa had pronounced, catching up the workbag and bundling it into her mother's arms. 'Knitting, yes; but our drawing-room mustn't be dowdy and nothing is so dowdy as darning.' So Beth did the darning in her own room to which, also, the picture of the children had been relegated. 'You *must* see, Mummie, that it simply *can't* go here now — however much you love it!' Philippa had cried, and Beth, submitting, remembered that Aldous had

always wished the picture away and wondered, with a sinking of the heart, how often his tastes had been oppressed by hers. So, as Philippa came in now, bringing the light with her, it was as if she entered her own domain, almost as if, Beth felt, the two old ladies cowering over the hearth were temporary encumbrances, only there on kindly sufferance.

'We've had a glorious ride!' said Philippa. Her habit was brown and her soft, high-crowned, wide-brimmed hat. She was very smart with a crop and a white stock folded up under her chin. Her cheeks glowed with pale colour; her eyes, under the electric light, looked black rather than blue. Beth had made everything so easy for her that from the first she had spoken with complete confidence of her father and their reunion; but her grandmother had made nothing easy, and it was because of her erect dark presence that Beth's ear detected the note of artifice in Philippa's gaiety.

'Did you get very wet? Wasn't it raining most of the time?' she asked, and Philippa came and leaned her elbows on the back of her chair.

'It didn't rain at all; only drizzled, and I love riding in a drizzle — it's queer how ugly a day can be from inside a house and how delicious if you're out

in it. — The Park was all the colour of the Velasquez hunting scene, in the National Gallery, you know, Mummie; — all dun and umber and *tête de nègre;* — and the deer were washed in with strokes of fawn-colour. — It was marvellous. Only of course Richmond Park isn't nearly big enough.'

'Are you craving for the Downs?' Mrs. Oliffe enquired. She had an unerring instinct for the hidden thing in people's motives and a cruel talent for revealing it to them. Beth knew that above her head Philippa, while her hand patted her braids into place, was slightly flushing.

'Of course. There's nothing like the Downs for riding,' she said.

'Perhaps you have arranged to go to Sussex in the spring and enjoy them,' said Mrs. Oliffe.

'No; I haven't,' Philippa replied.

'Is your father's wife well?' Mrs. Oliffe went on, and Beth, beginning inwardly to tremble, knew that her mother could not control herself — or would not. 'Is she going to dance through the rest of the London winter or go abroad again? — They'll be back in good time for your Easter holidays, I suppose.'

'Yes. I think Daddy would see to that. They're staying here, I believe,' said Philippa. 'She's not

very strong and Daddy seems to be rather worried about her.'

'This jazzing night-club life must be exceedingly exacting, even for the young and strong,' Mrs. Oliffe continued, her arms folded, her eyes fixed upon the flames, 'and for a middle-aged man, like your father, I should have imagined such an existence to be disintegrating. She may not be very strong, but she must be very tough. A thick-hided lady — in every sense. — Is your father continuing to see you while you're at school? Will he be going down to Eastbury? I don't know how headmistresses look upon these modern relationships, but perhaps they enter the general conspiracy to make everything easy for the guilty parent.'

'We shall see each other as often as we can,' said Philippa. She had lifted her hands from her mother's braids and they were now holding the chair back.

'And how does Mrs. Wyntringham like that?'

'I don't know how she likes it. We like it.'

'And how do you suppose your mother likes it?' Mrs. Oliffe pursued, a rising flame in her voice. 'How do you suppose she has liked having you spend most of your holidays with your father —

even to this last afternoon which you couldn't yield to her?'

'I live with Mummie!' Philippa exclaimed.

'Live with her! She has the privilege of taking care of you, but I don't see that you live with her! It's kicks for her and halfpence for your father, it seems to me, when it comes to living!'

'You're trying to be horrid, Grannie! — Just trying to!' Philippa had started back and was standing now in the middle of the room her hands clenched at her sides. 'Mummie always understands and you never do! I do love him more than anything, and he loves me and why shouldn't we be together? We belong to each other. I can't breathe unless he's there. It's no use, Grannie, trying to wreak things on me! — I simply won't give him up and you may as well accept it now!'

'I don't ask and I don't expect you to give him up,' cried Mrs. Oliffe, as fiercely and almost as girlishly as her grandchild, while Beth helplessly murmured: 'Mother! Please!—' 'I know too well that that is useless — since your poor mother set him free to come back here and flaunt his new life before her! — But I do ask for decency. I do ask for some consideration for your mother.'

'How don't I consider Mummie? I haven't seen

him for nearly two years and my holidays are the only time.'

'And the only time for her.'

'She always has me. — On and on and on.'

'She has you and you can't breathe while you're with her! Very pleasant, very gratifying, for her!'

'Mother! Oh, please!' Beth cried. 'Really Philippa and I understand.'

'Philippa understands that she can use you till the last drop of your blood — as he did. — The miscreant!'

'How dare you call him a miscreant!' cried Philippa, and as Beth, in tears now, turned to her appealingly, she seemed to see the child's eyes flashing fire. 'What has he done that is wrong? We can't help caring for people — Mummie said we couldn't! — from the very beginning! And if she was miserable without him — I mean Cosima — and in love — how could he help going to her when he could make Mummie safe with Uncle Edward's money? What has he done wrong? — He couldn't help not staying in love with Mummie! He thought of her, but he had to think of the other one too. — People aren't all shut up in cages, by twos, for ever, nowadays, Grannie — whatever you may wish!'

Mrs. Oliffe had risen and confronted her grandchild, trembling. 'Fathers whose children suffocate for lack of them are miscreants if they abandon them. I repeat my word. It is a good word. It fits the facts.' — Trembling she drew her furs around her shoulders. 'All the facts.'

'He hasn't abandoned me! He never for a moment dreamt he'd left me!'

'Indeed. He'd rob his wife of everything; name; position; children. — Miscreant, my dear; I'm sorry that it is so, sorry that my daughter married him and that you have him for a father. Good-bye, Beth.' And trembling, ashen, aghast already at the havoc she had wrought, Mrs. Oliffe went swiftly from the room.

'I'll never see her again! Never! Never! Never!' cried Philippa. She was sobbing.

'Oh — darling — don't say that. — She's so miserable!'

'You're miserable. But you're never horrible and malicious and cruel!'

'Because I've got something. She has nothing.'

'I don't want to see anyone who hates him!' cried Philippa. 'All he asks is to be near us, Mummie. All he asks is that you should see him and all be friends.'

'Oh — darling — please. I'll do anything to make it happier. — Some day perhaps it will be natural.'

'I know. — Poor Mummie. — I know you understand. He understands too. He thinks you're an angel. — But Grannie isn't an angel. She's a malicious toad!' sobbed Philippa. 'And I hate her back.'

'It's because she loves you that she behaves like this, darling. She feels you nearer than she does me really — and that's what maddens her.'

And now, in her tears and rage, Philippa laughed brokenly. 'That's right, Mummie,' she muttered, putting her arms for a brief caress around her mother's neck. 'Grannie's right about that! It's you who'll always get the kicks!'

CHAPTER III

COSIMA was weeping again. She often wept and Aldous often sat in the bedroom in Hyde Park Square, with arms folded and an endurance almost bland. Even as he sat thus to-day, glancing over at her to make sure that her eye did not, from its weltering grief, detect him, he was still able to read a snatch here and there from the book he had laid down on the arm of his chair, when her reproaches and apprehensions had at length melted into tears. 'You don't really care! You don't care in the least!' she now articulated.

'It wouldn't do us any good if I cared as much as you do,' Aldous returned, keeping Whitehead's last paragraph in mind. 'Much better for us both, surely, my poor Cosima, that only one of us should take such mischances so to heart.'

'Mischances! You call it a mischance that I should be insulted!'

'And you call it an insult not to be asked to a party. We have a different idea of language.'

'I call it an insult when the woman who gives it used to feed out of my hand. I remember the day

when she ran snapping at any invitation I tossed her! — She's gone through life on her tongue — licking the dust!' said Cosima, 'and now, when she thinks she's safely attached to the rung I helped her to, she tries to kick me down the ladder!'

At this Aldous laughed, with such real appreciation that Cosima checked her sobs to listen. 'I like that — and so do you,' he said. 'Come — when you can be so entertaining you're not really suffering so badly, darling. — Why should you want to go to a dust-licker's house?'

'Oh, don't be silly! — don't pretend to be utterly silly, Aldous, when you understand perfectly well what these symbols mean. Are we to be in, or are we to be out? That is the question. I never dreamed in my old days that I could ask such a question. It was I who gave and others who received; I chose my world. But now — I find myself scheming — with the rest of the herd — and I hate it! — I hate it!' cried Cosima with her weary fierceness, pushing back her hair. 'And I won't withdraw to the Continent and own myself beaten!'

'You're not beaten. You're remarkably successful.'

'You think so, because you don't care. You don't care for anything,' said Cosima with a

sombreness more sincere than her grief had been, 'except your horrible books, and Philippa. — When are you going to have your next assignation?' It was summer and the next week-end was Philippa's half-term holiday.

'On Saturday. We are riding in Richmond Park, as usual. I'm not seeing her as much as I'd hoped to.'

'I suppose her mother cares to have her now and then. She really saw nothing of her at Christmas or Easter.'

'She understands, as I'm sure you do, that we have a long time to make up.'

'I can't really quite understand how, with a child, there can be so much to make up for,' said Cosima. Her tears were now dried. She had crossed her lovely arms behind her head — lovely still in his eyes, though so ravaged by intemperate grief, and had regained completely her gloomy composure. 'What you have to say to each other I can't imagine. One understands a clandestine love affair. Lovers have something to do. But not a clandestine child's party.'

Aldous was silent for a moment, and in the slight flush that mounted to his cheek she read his distaste for her antithesis. She often provoked this

distaste deliberately, proving to herself her independence of his standards. 'It's not clandestine,' he said, 'and it's not a child's party. What I have to do is to be with her, and every day she is different; for she is growing up. That's the delight of being a father. — And the crucifixion — in my case,' he added suddenly, surprising himself, 'since I must miss so much. What a father longs for is to live with his child; not to take her to the seaside for a week-end or out riding on a half-holiday.'

Cosima lay very still for a long moment after this. Vexed, even cut to the quick as she found herself by the mishaps of her ambiguous position, she was at bottom, and Aldous knew it, capable of reckless indifference to worldly standards. Her mind contracted now from ill-temper to stillness. The world mattered; the parties and the people mattered; but what mattered to her more than anything in the world was Aldous. That was why he could hurt her as nothing else could ever do; and frighten her. She was frightened as she heard the word 'crucifixion'; and she lay so long silent that Aldous too was aware of the touch of fear. 'If only she could come and live with us,' he muttered, his foot moving to and fro uneasily, 'as I thought she

would. It's such a commonplace nowadays, when parents separate, that the children should go to one or the other. It wouldn't mean that Philippa would leave her mother; but her tie with her is so much less close than with me, and she could see her then as she sees me now.'

Still Cosima lay silent. When at last she spoke it was in a soft yet steely voice. 'I've never prevented her coming, by word or deed or even look.'

'I know you haven't, Cosima.'

'Why doesn't she come, then?'

'From loyalty to her mother.'

'You mean that her mother pretends to leave her free and really holds her back?'

'*You* can hardly mean that when you've just said that Beth has given her up to me for the greater part of her holidays. — Beth has been all that is generous and trusting: from the beginning.'

Again, for a moment, Cosima lay silent. Then she said: 'If she doesn't come, then, it's because she hates me too much.'

'She doesn't hate you in the least.' His voice was as careful as hers. 'She's never hated you. She took to you, very definitely, at Rest Harrow. We were both aware of that.'

'Was I aware of it? I don't remember. I only

remember that she gave us a fright and made you angry with me.'

'Cosima, don't go back on those past vicissitudes.'

'You remind me of them.'

'It's the last thing I mean to do.'

'When you do nothing but brood and pine over Philippa?'

'It was you who brought up her name.'

'I merely named the object that stands there between us. — Shall I tell you why she won't come near me? — She hates me and thinks that by not seeing me she puts me in an ambiguous position. It's an intolerable position for a second wife if the child refuses to see her.'

'Do you pretend that you are so eager for Philippa to live with us?'

He knew so well the wild and sullen note of her voice when she felt herself at bay. She turned her eyes from him, pushing back her hair and muttering: 'I'd rather have anything than this. If she lived with us you might have time to think of me again. — And people wouldn't be able to say that I'd stolen you from your wife and that your child refused to have anything to do with me! As long as she sees you and won't see me, she is insulting me!'

Aldous sat silent, frowning slightly, his eyes cast down, and as he did not answer her she looked back at him and saw hovering on his lips the slight smile of disdain that of all his looks she dreaded most. Rage mounted in her, seeing it; then came a sudden drop to dread and horror. If she challenged that disdain, what might not be her answer? She lay and looked at him and when she spoke the sound of her own feeble voice startled her, full of a sick timidity: — 'Aldous — what am I to do?'

He looked up at her heavily.

'What am I to do?' she repeated, feeling herself a whipped dog.

'Are you asking me to give up seeing Philippa?' he asked.

'No! No, no!' she cried. 'I'm asking nothing against you! I'm only asking what I can do to make you happy. — I can't be happy — not for one moment — if you are crucified!' She put up her hand to hide the tears that streamed down her face.

'Cosima,' he muttered. 'Forgive that hasty word.'

'But it's the truth — don't you think I see it? Shall I humble myself before her and beg her to come for your sake?'

'My dear Cosima — No. That's impossible. I wouldn't have her on such terms.'

'I'd be willing! You think Beth so generous. I can be generous too!'

'My poor child, of course you can.'

'Ah, but not so generous as you think!' Wildly she laughed in the midst of her tears — it was this ruthless sincerity in her that held him, he sometimes thought, more closely to her than all else. — 'And neither is Beth! It's because we love you and will accept anything from you! — But call it generosity if it allows me to hold up my poor head beside her! — What can I do? Try to think, Aldous. Isn't there a way out?'

From his place in the window, sitting very still, he gazed at her, sounding her. — 'You know, apart from the personal difficulty, there's another, Cosima,' he said. 'The money. All the money is yours. I'm living with you; and if she came it would be, she would feel, to live on you.' His eyes were suffering, perplexed, yet, for his eyes, gentle: they brooded on her; it was of her — was it not? — they were thinking and of what she could do.

'All the money isn't mine. Your little income would cover her keep, and you know Ferdy could double it for you any day on the Stock Exchange.

And your book is going to be a great success; your book will bring in thousands.' She smiled at him. She saw him deeply touched, and the sick distaste with which she felt herself forced into an unwilling magnanimity gave way to tremulous trust and happiness. — He would love her all the more. — He would love her as he had never yet dared to do — whole-heartedly. 'Put it to her, Aldous,' she said. 'Let it be all from you.'

In his eyes, too, she saw the trust and happiness. — 'My darling little Cosima,' he murmured. — 'May I really? — I've thought of it again and again, turning it over and over — because I know we oughtn't to be apart, the child and I; — if we were together, Cosima darling, I shouldn't have to think of her so much, to distress you by my brooding — you're quite right; I do brood and pine. — And what I wondered is: — what about Uncle Edward's house? You know he left me his house in Hampshire; he and my mother grew up there and I used to go there as a boy. It's been let for years while he lived in Italy; but the lease has just fallen in and the tenant's just gone, and there it is, Cosima, my home really; — a small unimportant place, but, as I remember, rather charming; pale pink brick, on a little hill and looking at the river; and you could

make it as lovely as you liked inside and have all your servants; but it would be my home, and you and I could live there for part of the year and Philippa could share our life. What do you think, Cosima? I've wondered about it ever since the tenants left.'

She leaned her head on her hand among her pillows looking over at him. She knew that something looming, large, perhaps ominous, was there above her, upon her, but that her relation with Aldous depended on her acceptance of it, her making of it hers. She would not look beyond the moment's lovely, painful need. Nothing could bring him so near. And once he was near again — for Philippa had divided them — she could contrive to keep him.

'It's a beautiful plan,' she said. 'Simply beautiful, darling. — It's the house of my dreams. It will be our home and we'll make it Philippa's.'

CHAPTER IV

OH, Mummie darling — you know it won't mean that I don't love you just as much as ever — and even more!' said Philippa. She had come in from riding in Richmond Park on the Saturday afternoon and, her hat cast on a chair, was leaning against her mother's shoulder, her hand in hers, as she told her that she had promised Daddy to live with him. Tears were in her eyes, and yet she did not know whether it was joy, sorrow, or fear that she most felt; most of all, perhaps, the tears came because she was horribly sorry for Mummie that she herself should be so glad to be going away from her. 'Of course he said it all depended on you; — on you; you; *you*,' said Philippa, pressing her hand down on her mother's shoulder at each repetition. 'He hoped so much you'd let him come and talk to you about it and tell you how he thanked you; — for of course I told him what you've always said — that you left me perfectly free.'

Beth sat holding her child and her heart was like a stone. Aldous took first himself and then their

child from her, and how could she see him and be thanked by him for being what he made her — a bereaved and helpless creature? It was the sense of her helplessness that was upon her as she sat there. She could do nothing but submit and be still. To hold out a finger, to utter a murmur would be to arrest all the currents of Philippa's joy and trust, to spoil everything; not only for Philippa but for herself; — she saw through her own seeming magnanimity; it was better to have Philippa gone, full of this gratitude and yearning, than to have her stay from pity. 'It's all right, darling,' she said, holding her and stroking back her hair. 'It had to be.'

'I'll be with you often and often — when we're in London, you know,' Philippa promised her. 'I'll go to them at River House for the holidays, and when I come back it will be first you and then Daddy. You see I'll be in London, Mummie; Daddy wants me to go to Miss Dexter again. He says we've been separated too long to have me at a boarding-school. And of course London is just a concession; I made that very clear to him. London depends on *her*, and how I like her. And River House depends on *me*. River House will be really more my home than hers, and even if I seem to be

living with them both, it will really be only with *him*, and she will know it. — I'll see you often, Mummie. You're not really losing me,' Philippa promised, though, even as she said it, she knew — horribly clear-sighted about herself as she always was — that to return to the sad little house in Kensington, the house where she had suffered and suffocated for two years and watched her mother suffer, could never be anything but an effort, a sacrifice. And, as she thought of Cosima and Hyde Park Square, there slid into her mind a picture of herself dancing with a wreath of flowers and glow-worms on her head. Why glow-worms? — But they shone like dim stars and she would be dancing with someone much more interesting than Roger Wedderburn.

'You must be nice to her, since you are going to live with her; it would make it too difficult for your father if you weren't nice to her,' Beth forced her lips to utter while she, too, but in a searing vision, saw Philippa led into Lady Basingham's ballroom by Cosima Brandon. She had not known at the time that her mother's barbed words had fixed themselves in her memory, but now the poison stirred and rankled. — Philippa, in all her young loveliness, Cosima Brandon's trophy. How could

she be so mean, so selfish, as to be scorched by this paltry jealousy? Could she not rejoice in her child's happiness for its own sake, even if with no share in it? Were all the flowers of human love rooted in this sandy soil of self?

'I'll be as nice as necessary; it will be carefully calculated! — Because of him, of course,' said Philippa. She was restored by her mother's quietness. She drew herself upright and dried her eyes. Her fresh, firm little face was charming after tears and brought a memory of the smiling head of a sculptured angel seen somewhere on a French cathedral; faintly swollen eyelids and lips just touched with salt lending an infantile sweetness to its intent elation. 'She'll be nice to me for the same reason. It will be a contest of niceness! And she's one up just now, isn't she? — We must own that; — planning for the house and wanting me to go with them to choose everything. It'll be much easier to meet them like that, won't it? I'm going on Monday, you know, and we can talk about curtains and carpets and be able to pretend we've been seeing each other all this time! Daddy was very eager that I should realise how perfectly she understands everything; — understands, I mean, that it's he and I; not he and I and her at all.'

'She loves him very much. I see that,' said Beth. 'I'm glad.'

'Are you, Mummie darling? Very glad? I know you want to be and I suppose that's the first step. I'm not glad at all; but then I'm horrible. And the only reason — at the very bottom of my heart — that I can bear her loving him so much is that I know I love him better, and that though she does love him, the reallest thing in her is that she wants him to love her. She's a loveress, you know. I always felt that.' So Philippa translated the old word 'paramour' that the years had taught her to avoid.

'With all that she is doing for him and accepting for him she must be sure of his love,' said Beth. It distressed and bewildered her to share such insights with her child, but Philippa, who always seemed to see one step further than she did, made sharing inevitable. 'And aren't we all loveresses?'

'No; not all; wives aren't. Wives go on loving their husbands even when they can't admire them any longer. They love them all the more, perhaps, when they are disappointed in them. But loveresses don't. And a wife goes on loving even if he stops loving her; whereas if he stops loving a loveress, she hates him.'

Beth gazed at her child. 'How have you come to think and see such things?'

'I don't know. It's in the air, I suppose. We're so wise, nowadays, aren't we? — I mean when our fathers and mothers are divorced — and learn so many things. I'm sorry for women, you know, and I've always been rather sorry for her, really. Because it must be so much harder to share a husband with somebody else's child than to share a father with a loveress. Wives and loveresses are, somehow, both so temporary compared with children, aren't they?'

'You have every reason to think so,' said Beth. She did not mean to say it bitterly, but Philippa, considering her, murmured: 'It's such a horrible shame, Mummie.'

Any concession to Philippa's insight seemed always to involve her in a further complicity, and Beth almost faltered, fearing the theme: 'What is, darling?'

'About men and women. The unfairness. We seem to have all the advantage; and then it doesn't last.'

'But when one loves people, it isn't a question of advantage,' Beth groped, thinking of the sandy soil of self. — Though what right had she to put before Philippa truths she could not live by?

'But how can one help wanting to be loved best — and always?' Philippa asked, and did not her voice now falter? 'And what is it that mixes everything up, so that loving and being in love are such different things?'

'Are they so different?'

'Why, Mummie, of course they are. You might love someone with all your soul and think them angels; but if they were bald and fat, or if they dropped their aitches and didn't know how to come into a drawing-room, or if they only had a nose twice too big, like Cyrano — you couldn't possibly be in love with them or think of marrying them. — And you'd trample on them to get to the one you *were* in love with!'

'No: not trample, darling; I'm sure you'd never do that. — Isn't religion the only answer, to everything, Phil? We must love God most, and then we can be really true to each other, and really love each other.'

'Oh — God, Mummie!' Philippa shook back her head impatiently. 'God couldn't make you want to marry the fat angel who dropped his aitches! — I don't believe God's a bit of use when it comes to being in love, because religion always seems to say you must sacrifice yourself, and nobody would

want you to marry them if it was a sacrifice! — Mummie — I'm not going to be a wife, and I'm not going to be a loveress either! I mean, when it comes to being in love, I'll always care most for myself; — that's the only way. *He* loves you better then, too, and you are much more sure of keeping him; and when you love yourself best, you don't hate him, even if he should stop loving you. — Mummie' — she tossed aside from the sinister theme — 'I'm going to bring you all the patterns for my dresses, and take your advice about my hats, as I always have. — She may imagine that she's going to influence me; but she's not; not in any way. She dresses beautifully; she'd be simply nowhere if she didn't; — but I don't *need* to dress like that.' — Philippa was smiling into her mother's eyes, winning a smile from her pale lips. — 'I'm going to be different from her in everything. — And to begin with — never will I paint my mouth!'

CHAPTER V

PHILIPPA'S compassionate understanding could do no more than cloud her joy, and it was joy only — joy almost fierce in its resolute control — that Beth saw shining from her face as, with an upward glance, she drove off on Monday afternoon to meet her father at his club. Beth and Billy stood in the drawing-room window to see her go, and something in the respective attitudes and distances, rather than self-pity, brought to Beth's mind the image of a sinking ocean liner and the lifeboat making off from it. So a couple left behind might stand on the deck and look down at a departing comrade. Silent little Billy was part of the stillness. People left behind on doomed steamers would not say anything to each other. 'But I've got Billy. — It isn't doomed if I have Billy,' she thought, thrusting away the images that made dear little Philippa seem, in her joy, heartless. 'It's just as much a ship of life as Philippa's and Aldous's. We can't be one ship; that's all. We must be two.' It was like having to learn to be another creature, to accept the knife of severance slicing down through one's being

and know that one must contrive to grow a whole animal from a half. — How could a mother ever make unity from such cleavage? But, staunching the dreadful similes, she said: 'I think it's a good idea that they should meet first with so many outside things to discuss. — It will make it easier for them all, as Philippa says, if they talk about curtains and carpets.'

'Will it?' said Billy. He gazed down over the empty street, over the hawthorn-tree, and his fingers played with the tassel of the blind. Billy loved Philippa, dearly. He, too, saw their life cut in two.

'I think all these things are easier nowadays, darling,' she said, wondering how, while she talked of ease for Philippa and Aldous, she should find some for Billy, 'because people see realities more and conventions less. It's really conventions that make so much of the suffering, Billy. The real thing — isn't it, darling? — is that the people who care most for each other should be together.'

'You care just as much for Philippa as Father does,' said Billy.

'Perhaps I do. But it's not reciprocal. — I mean, she doesn't care as much for me.'

'That's what I don't understand,' said Billy,

looking down into the street and twisting the cord round his hand.

'Oh, but, darling, these things are born in us. She's always been nearer to her father than to anyone in the world.'

'But after what he's done, to you, I can't understand it,' said Billy, his gentle persistence touched now with austerity. 'Because he's such a cruel, selfish man.'

She was too much startled for a moment to speak. She knew, ardently as he had admired and marvelled at his father, that old memories of anxiety and shrinking had combined with his deep resentment on her behalf to sink a gulf between them; but she had never imagined that Billy would judge him. It frightened her to hear him. It hurt her, for herself as much as for Aldous. It set the old life further away than it had ever been. 'Oh, Billy;—don't, darling,' she murmured, leaning her forehead against the window-frame and trying to think. 'That's not true. It's because you love me most that you can feel it. He fell in love with someone else. People can't help that, Billy.'

'Can't they?'

'No: it comes to them, dear,' said Beth, while Philippa's words rang strangely in her mind:—

Would Aldous have trampled her down to reach the one he was in love with? 'People can't help it, Billy,' she repeated.

He stood silent, twisting and twisting his hand in the cord and she felt the pressure in him of most unchildlike thought. And suddenly, turning his eyes on her, he said: 'Mummie, can't people run away? — I mean, when they feel it coming? It's only little things with children, I know; but isn't it really the same when you grow up? — What I mean is, the more you go on looking at something you want to do, the more you can't help doing it; — and isn't the only way, just to stop looking and run?'

She had tried to show Billy her own new insights, but it seemed to her that his were perhaps deeper. She was afraid of him and of his truths that put Aldous so far away, and she said, turning from the window: 'I expect what happens is that they don't know they're in danger till too late.' And putting his arm in hers, to go with her, Billy said: 'It seems to me that mothers and fathers ought to know.'

She found nothing more to say to Billy at the moment. They had their tea together, a strange, sad tea, knowing themselves, for the first time in their lives, alone in the world, and they talked to

Chuffie rather than to each other. An animal was a wonderful spiritual safety-valve, Beth meditated, finding that she and Billy could both laugh naturally at his pretty imperative ways over his milk, and Billy said, feeding him a lump of butter off his finger-tip: 'When I grow up and go to Oxford, Mummie, you will come and live with me there and we'll have a Cairn terrier as well as Chuff; the wheat-coloured kind you know, to go for walks with you when I'm studying.' She had the strange new feeling that Billy was already taking care of her and trying to shield her from realising how much they were going to miss Philippa.

She was in the drawing-room, doggedly working at charity accounts, when Philippa returned, and she saw at once in the child's face the fierce marks of the new life. A thin leaf of red, like her father's, was laid on each cheek, and going to the window, pulling off her gloves, she said: 'Well, Mummie,' and stood there, looking out, considering within herself, Beth knew, how best to conceal, or reveal, the experience that burned within her. 'She is really doing her very best,' she said. 'It's a lovely room, isn't it?'

There rose in Beth's mind a bitter memory of a cold spring day, a magnolia branch, her own fixed, frightened face in the mirror, and the gulls striking

down with the truth at her heart, and seeking foothold for herself, and for Philippa, she murmured, looking away from her child: 'Yes; isn't it lovely? Was the nice pug there?'

'Yes; Montague was there. I was awfully glad to see him again and I really think he remembered me. He is such a charming dog. He lived at Rest Harrow with old Mr. Chantry all the time they were abroad.'

'They.' Philippa now could hardly speak a word that would not cut. She knew this; and this was part of her uncertainty.

'He must be getting rather old,' said Beth, leaning down to lift her knitting-bag, 'the pug I mean, not Mr. Chantry.' Unless she could keep her unflawed surface Philippa might become fixed in shyness.

'Not so very. It's only two years, you know. We all talked about Montague a good deal; it was rather useful.' And it was brave of Philippa to go on calmly about Montague. They must both be remembering the moonlit corridor, Montague in his basket and the white figure at the door. 'She's not a bit pretty really.' Philippa still looked out and in her voice with its change of tone was a note of defiance. 'I can't think how she manages to make

one think so — when she's really almost ugly.' And now, feeling her mother's calm and that she could trust it, Philippa turned to her suddenly. 'Mummie — I almost feel as if I wouldn't go!'

Beth's heart gave a great leap, then stood still, fixing her in a rigidity of caution. 'Why, dear?' she asked.

Philippa swung her gloves. 'He adores her so.'

'But darling — you knew that.'

'I didn't know how much. I didn't dream how much. — It was of her he was thinking all the time! — Hardly a bit of me!' said Philippa, and the fierceness corroded her young face and lit cold flames in her eyes.

'That's imagination, Philippa. Of course he was grateful to her.'

'Grateful! Of course he was! That's all he was thinking of — how beautifully she was doing it! How exquisite she was being to me — making it all as soft as silk! What about me! What was *I* doing! Giving you up — and Billy — and everything — for him!' cried Philippa, her arms stiff at her sides with the gloves clenched in her hand.

Beth gazed at her and her heart throbbed; but not with hope. There was no hope for her in this passion of repudiation; it was fear, for Philippa, for

Aldous — even for Cosima Brandon — that she felt. 'Darling,' she said slowly, weighing out her words; 'you ought not to go if you're going to hate her.'

Philippa looked hard at her, then turned to the window and stood silent. 'I don't hate her,' she said at last.

'You are jealous. You ought not to go if you're going to grudge her his love.'

'I can't bear it,' Philippa muttered, 'if he loves her best.'

'I don't think he does love her best,' said Beth. 'Of course he was thinking of what she was doing for you both. He didn't have to think of you. He is sure of you. You're his child and he has you back. — It's what you said, Philippa, a child is nearer than a loveress. — Don't you see it all? — I do.'

It was perhaps the first time in her life that Beth felt herself showing Philippa something that by herself she could not see. It was a strange advantage and tasting it she knew a strange joy, sharp and cold and sweet as mountain air, lifting her far away from those sandy deserts of self. And from her child's face, as it turned to her again, she knew that she had spoken with the authority of that altitude. Philippa saw with her. 'I believe you are

right, Mummie,' she said. Her eyes searched her mother's eyes. 'I think it was like that, really — though I was so seething inside that I couldn't feel it.'

'I expect she was seething, too.'

'I expect she was. — And *he* was — with terror! Poor old Daddy!' A new note was in Philippa's voice. Beth had never before heard her speak of her father with pity. It was almost as startling, as hurting, as to hear Billy speak of him with hostility. 'It's all up with him, Mummie,' said Philippa, 'if I don't get on with her. I felt that, too. — Yes,' still she swung her gloves, still searched her mother's eyes, 'I believe you are quite right. So I *can* go, can't I?'

CHAPTER VI

COSIMA stood, as she had stood at Chinon, half-hidden by the curtain of her bedroom window, and looked at Aldous and Philippa walking down to the river. The view from the back of River House singularly depressed her, as the house itself had depressed her, from the rainy day when she and Aldous and the child had alighted from the car and looked up at it, bland and pink and bare, standing so complacently above the ring court and the monkey-puzzle-tree. She had never imagined that River House was going to be almost suburban, thinking always of a magnified cottage, apt for every gay transformation like dear, foolish Rest Harrow, or else a 'place,' a character, with park and lodge and a breath from the past ensconcing it, however mildly, in beauty. River House was not modern; yet it belonged to no epoch with sufficient emphasis to convey character of any sort. It was merely a house, a commodious house, with the ring court in front, oblong lawn behind sloping to the river, kitchen-garden and garage suitably placed; the shabby little town of Burch, with cinema palace and cheap shops, was only a mile away, and one

could hear, if not see, the horrible motor-bus that plied to and fro along the highroad. It was just the sort of house she had realised dejectedly — and her dejection had an edge — that an old Scottish scholar would find it appropriate to retire to when, in the seventies of the last century, he had left Edinburgh and settled for his declining years in a warmer clime. She saw Aldous's antecedents anew as she saw River House and the monkey-puzzle-tree, doubtless planted by his grandparents. They had both been Scotch, and Aldous looked like his mother who had married an English banker. It was an exceedingly solid ancestry and exceedingly uninspiriting; like River House. 'Very, very middle-class, isn't it?' she had said sadly and sweetly as they went up the steep flight of steps that led to the open front door, where old Mrs. Mickleham awaited them austerely. 'But of course the monkey-puzzle can be cut down before we go back this evening.'

'We *are* middle-class, you and I, aren't we, Daddy!' Philippa laughed. 'I think it's rather a lamb of a house!' Cosima already knew that Philippa would swallow the monkey-puzzle if it were the right move in the game she played, so astutely and with such an air of spontaneity.

'The monkey-puzzle is a blot on our escutcheon, I own, and we will cut it down with our own hands, Philippa,' smiled Aldous; his elation in having them there together undimmed. 'But look, darling' — it was Cosima he called darling — 'I want you to see the view from the drawing-room. It's really rather charming.'

'Yes, darling; I see; yes, I see it all,' said Cosima. Mrs. Mickleham had thrown open the doors so that, as they stood in the small square dark hall, they could survey the study on the left, panelled in dark wood, the dining-room on the right, papered in red, and the drawing-room in front of them, a long room with a French window leading by another flight of steps to the lawn that, with trellises on either side, ran down to the river. — 'Like the door of a bathing-machine,' said Cosima, moving to this window. — 'As if one could jump down into the sea. — What shall we do with it?' She looked about her. 'It won't bear a stress.'

Philippa, who had skimmed into the study and dining-room and out again, laughed at this, appreciatively. It was strange to feel that from Philippa — who hated her, she felt sure of it, and whom she hated — she could count on a more discerning appreciation than from Aldous, whose attention

was sometimes vagrant and sometimes inappropriately austere. 'What *will* you do with it, Cosima?' Philippa said, coming to stand beside her. 'Do leave that big mirror there at the end. — I like the way it reflects everything.'

'The only thing I can *see*, at the moment,' said Cosima, moving back into the hall and holding her white motoring cloak with one hand to her breast, 'is a globe, a large globe, on a stand; here. One of those silvery-yellow old globes that make one feel as recent and insignificant as reading about your atoms, Aldous — or the Milky Way. — England drifted up like a bit of seaweed near the Arctic Circle. — Seaweed,' she murmured, walking back into the drawing-room again and turning her large eyes mournfully from side to side: 'an aquarium. Here. — A Chinese-looking big glass tank standing in the window, with shells and plants and goldfish. — That's all I do see at present; — and I call that mirror rather grisly'; she glanced round at the huge gilt mirror that filled the wall opposite the fireplace and reflected their three figures with Mrs. Mickleham in the background. 'Chintz is the only thing, plenty of fresh crackling chintz. We can't try for originality anywhere. The ghosts of your grandparents would haunt us if we did, Aldous.'

'The ghosts of the grandparents will simply love the globe and the aquarium! How clever of you to think of them, Cosima! — To please the ghosts and to be original too. All the same, I like it, I like it most awfully,' Philippa declared, standing and looking round her. 'Your mother was brought up here, wasn't she, Daddy? How strange to think how often she must have stood just where we are now and looked out at the river. — It's not exactly a real river, is it? But one could get a punt down it. And aren't the steps steep!'

'She wasn't brought up here. They didn't come until she was almost grown up; but she lived here for four or five years, until she married and went to London. And I remember it all perfectly' — Aldous was looking about him with a far-away look — 'and see my old grandmother sitting over there by the fire and reflected there in the mirror; — a queer old lady in a white shawl and cap and very wide-apart eyes. She spoke with a Scotch accent and read Kant and Hegel and nipped you up very sharply if you said anything excessive.'

'That's where he gets his eyes and his atoms, isn't it, Philippa?' said Cosima, smiling tenderly upon her husband, 'and his nippingness. Kant and

Hegel. Erudition fits too. We must concentrate on chintz and books as our background. You'll sit in your study over your books, darling, and Philippa and I will sit here among the chintz and goldfish, drinking tea. — The river does look very sluggish and reedy, but perhaps from the upper windows it flows.'

It flowed quite brightly to-day, Cosima had to own, looking down at it and at Aldous and Philippa who walked towards it as Lorrimer Cranley and Timmie walked up. But it was essentially sluggish, dismal, even, and she had said one day, when she and Aldous had come down to supervise the placing of the furniture, that it was the sort of river one might jump into and drown in if one got too miserable, to which, with a frosty glance, Aldous had said: 'Don't be silly, Cosima.' She had never become accustomed to Aldous's frost, though it had from the very first been one of the attributes that had most allured her to him, as a forlorn and weary bird might be allured to a lighthouse, seeking for warmth and finding only a pitiless glare. With custom it no longer allured, but it still arrested and disconcerted her, and it had been strange and painful to note how it left Philippa unperturbed.

Watching father and child together, she realised that much of their intercourse consisted in sharp-edged mockery. So many things about Aldous she had realised only since seeing him with Philippa. It made him a new person to her, and she did not know whether she felt more wistful or more angry when she saw Philippa put the right keys into locks whose presence she had not even suspected. Philippa walked about with him in rooms closed to her. She could hear them laughing inside them — as they laughed now, walking away from the house. Aldous must often have been lonely with her. One was lonely with someone who did not know the way into all one's rooms. But what was that loneliness to hers as she stood outside and heard him laughing with Philippa?

She watched them. They would not look back or think of her, for it was her rest hour. She was safely shut out of the way. The old salt hotness crept up from her heart to her throat and eyes as the vision came and she tried to dismiss the almost physical impression of abandonment; for it was not a thought; thought would reinstate before her the facts of Aldous's love and gratitude, displayed for her every day, when Philippa was with them. But was it not because of Philippa that he felt them?

Was it not Philippa who was now the surest way to his heart? There they went, needing nothing more, Aldous with his hand laid on Philippa's shoulder, Philippa with her hand on his, and Monty trotting at their heels. Even Monty preferred to be with Philippa since she could walk and run and play with him. Always this loneliness, under everything; she had always been alone; and no one had really ever loved her, as she needed love, except poor Jack. She had been first with Jack in everything. He had had eyes and heart only for her. And he was dead. — Now Lorrimer and Timmie met them and they paused to speak (Aldous was old and stiff and middle-class compared to Jack; she had idealised him, of course, because he was different from anyone she had ever known) — and now as they walked on she saw Philippa turn her face up to her father's and they interchanged a laughing glance, a glance that, if it did not mock, dismissed. Timmie and Lorrimer did not exist for Aldous and his daughter. Cosima's cheeks flushed suddenly, the deep upwelling from her burdened heart checked by anger. What right had they to find her friends laughable! The memory of their irreproachable demeanour when they were all together made her the angrier, set them apart in

antagonism, to her, and to her world. — Who were they, after all, to assess and dismiss and mock! To Timmie and Lorrimer, clever of the clever, knowing everybody and doing everything, was allotted that rôle, not to an obscure middle-aged Civil Servant with whom a brilliant young *mondaine* had had the misfortune to fall in love; not to his hateful hard-hearted child. — Oh! she knew she was thinking the most arrant nonsense and that she would be sorry for it; but when one's eyes were hot with tears, when one's cheeks flamed, what bubbled up out of the poor sick frothy heart was often truth in disguise and there was relief in indulging its expression. Timmie and Lorrimer had shown what was really a charming loyalty and friendship in coming down to this God-forsaken spot, and even if Aldous had written such a marvellous book it still remained to be seen whether it was quite worth all the portentous time and trouble he had taken over it. Two whole years! He had started it at once; plunged into it as soon as their feet were on French soil as if — she recalled it now with a scorching surmise — in escape from the gnawing of remorse. Yes, she had always suspected, under everything — and his had been the ardour and passion of a young lover — his fear and his re-

morse, taking refuge in joy or in work; but always taking refuge.

Now she was hot and weak and shaking. Aldous stooped to the punt; Monty stood barking and prancing; Philippa lifted him and kissed his head. — 'He's mine; — he's mine. — What right have you to take everything for granted!' Cosima muttered, indulging her conscious folly and watching the punt glide away, Aldous tall and thin and white leaning to the pole and Philippa plunging her arm, bare to the shoulder, in the shining water. They disappeared behind the pollarded willows and, hearing an alert step in the passage outside, Cosima dropped the curtain and went back to bed, quickly disposing herself under the eiderdown as if in calm repose, for that was Lorrimer's discreet rap at the door.

'Awake, darling?' Mrs. Cranley enquired. With her tight lithe plumpness and glittering eye she made Cosima think of an agile, active, well-fed Figaro. 'Have you had your rest?'

'Yes,' Cosima stretched drowsily. 'I've not slept, but I've rested. What time is it, Lorrimer?'

'Just three. We've been sleeping under the trees. — We met your family going down to the

punt just now and reminded them of the tennis-party.'

'Oh; the tennis-party,' Cosima murmured. She put her hand against her brow and gazed up at the ceiling.

'We ought to start at four, since it's quite fifteen miles away,' said Mrs. Cranley.

'If they forget, we can go without them,' said Cosima.

'Well, I don't think I'd do that if I were you,' Mrs. Cranley replied. 'I've rather wangled the invitation for you, darling; but you mustn't forget that things are still a little precarious and that the child is an asset; a very considerable asset. She makes you and Aldous look so very *rangés*.'

Cosima lay still, contemplating the ceiling. 'I don't think I care for invitations that have to be wangled for me,' she commented presently; and there was a dark note in her voice.

'Nonsense, my child,' said Mrs. Cranley. She had seated herself at the dressing-table and was carefully inlaying her features with a deeper shade of apricot powder. 'Don't take that attitude. It's so like you to be reckless, and it's so foolish when a very little care and caution will see you through.'

'I detest care and caution. I detest computing

county ladies. It's all such rank hypocrisy nowadays when nobody is punished for any breach of an antiquated code — if only they're strong enough.'

'It's not nowadays; it's been so always. Nobody is ever punished for anything if they're strong enough. Surely you are aware of that — my drifting, dreaming Cosima. The point is to be strong — because it's never comfortable to be trampled down — whether by a flock of sheep or a herd of buffaloes,' said Mrs. Cranley, and when she did not bare her teeth, when her quicksilver glance concentrated to this penetrating gravity, her face became the sad, sardonic face of a court-jester off duty.

'Well, I'm not strong, then,' said Cosima after another moment. 'I don't care enough, perhaps, to be strong, in such a cause.'

'Ah; that is your strength; precisely: and I'm behind you to direct it. I know you better than you know yourself and you'd simply hate to be trampled — you hated it in London — the few times it happened. — You've nothing to bother over this afternoon, especially with the child to account for you. I told Dorothy Frobisher the story when I saw her the other day in Dorsetshire. It was very

creditable to you. The man of genius, tied to an impossible wife and finding in you his only true companion; and then your bravery in facing it through and refusing all subterfuge. His child already preferring you to a dreary mother. I made quite a heroine of you. Dorothy likes heroines and was much impressed.'

Cosima lay and listened. 'It's rather a shame, though, you know, all the same, brick though you are,' she said.

'What's a shame? It's the truth, seen from a certain angle.'

'About *her*. His wife. I don't think he'd have been miserable a bit if he hadn't met me.'

'Not consciously, perhaps. But he did meet you. And I've seen her! Frump from head to foot.'

'I don't think so,' said Cosima, with a certain stubbornness of accent. 'She was harmless and helpless.'

'She was certainly helpless. But as to harmless, a woman like that is a life-taker and arrests all social circulation. I've nothing against her. Nobody has. But she really can't expect fidelity.'

'As for the child preferring me,' Cosima went on, 'you know that's untrue. She hates me and puts up with me because of him.'

'Oh, well, that's only to be expected,' said Mrs. Cranley, imprinting now a vigorous Cupid's bow along her upper lip. 'The point is that she's a good sport and plays up excellently well. And you needn't worry over her. She'll only stay in your life long enough to do you good. Men will go down like ninepins before her. She'll be married within two years.'

'Men may go down before her,' said Cosima, a note of sulkiness in her voice, 'but it doesn't follow that she'll get married. She worships her father and is as hard as granite and as cold as a cod-fish.'

'Ah, but she loves power. She has her eye on *les messieurs*, I assure you. I could see that plainly enough last time I was here, with Ronnie. She was quite aware of the effect she was producing, the young lady. Even Timmie's tough india-rubber heart shows signs of relaxation!' Mrs. Cranley had finished her face and rose, baring her canine teeth. 'She'll only do you good,' she repeated. 'So see that your little girl is ready in time to go with us, and as for you, my child, let me advise you to look your loveliest very unobtrusively. It doesn't do to make other women *know* they're dowdy.'

It was four o'clock when Cosima descended into

the hall and Aldous and Philippa had not yet returned. She had looked again and again from her window while dressing, muttering: 'Yes, he would forget anything — while he is with her!' — and at the last she hurried a little so that she could be sure of being found by them wearily waiting. Lorrimer's admonitions had sunken her heart still further in its dark resentment.

Timmie was in the hall. '*Too* seductive, darling!' he said, gazing up at her as she descended. 'Is it you, or georgette, or God?'

'Only georgette, I'm afraid,' said Cosima, lifting her arm to look down at her transparent blacks and whites, 'and I won't be seductive for long. — I'm tired out already and nothing in the world is so destructive to one's appearance as waiting for people. — No, they're not back yet. This is the price one pays for having a flapper in the house. One can be sure of nothing.'

'*I'm* good! *I'm* dressed and ready!' said Timmie as Cosima sank down on a straight chair beside the globe. 'Please say you like me!' He held out his short arms and slowly turned his stout white person, and Cosima said, with feeling: 'You are good and beautiful.'

Dear old Timmie and dear old Lorrimer. Under

all the artifice of their chatter they were the best friends she had, and, hotly, the memory of the exchanged smile returned to her. The cars were waiting — her large car and Timmie's little two-seater — and Lorrimer had come down and was composedly strolling on the gravel in front of the house, when Timmie from the drawing-room window cried, all good cheer: 'Here they are! Pan and Syrinx! And it's only ten past four!'

Cosima leaned her arm on the gilt frame of the globe. Timmie's presence must restrain her, but she felt that she could have burst forth in bitterest upbraiding. 'I suppose you forgot,' she said, looking up at Aldous as, all innocent elation, he appeared before her. His hair was tossed, his flannels streaked with mud, and Philippa, carrying a sheaf of bulrushes, barearmed and barelegged, was even more dishevelled. She must restrain herself, but her dark glance held a repudiation that told Aldous in a moment how altered were his skies since the seeming serenity of their parting. 'But it's only four,' he said.

'Monty went into the river — after a water-rat. — Oh, catch him, Timmie,' said Philippa, laughing with a hateful unconcern, as poor Monty, panting and plastered with mud, darted in among them.

'He's so ecstatic that he'll jump on Cosima and spoil her dress.'

'He'll jump on *me* and spoil *my* dress!' cried Timmie, fleeing, like a fat nymph, with uplifted arms, while Cosima in tones of ice said: 'Please pick him up yourself, Philippa, since you are as filthy as he is. And will you ring the bell, Timmie? I meant to take him. He's wretched without me; but he must stay behind and be washed.'

Aldous was gazing down at her. 'We had no watch. We wanted to get the bulrushes. We thought you'd like them.'

Cosima glanced at them. 'Why under Heaven, my dear, should you think I'd like bulrushes? As little as monkey-puzzles, I assure you. — Well — do you mind going up and dressing? I reminded you, you know, and so did Lorrimer. — Horton, will you please take Monty and give him to Pratt. Ask her to wash and dry him thoroughly. She'd better walk him out in the sun, I think, for a little while.'

'I'm so sorry, but we won't be a moment. — Hurry up, Philippa,' said Aldous, and father and daughter mounted the stairs, Philippa, still all unconcern, carrying the rejected bulrushes.

'I shall be much more than a moment. — We're

hardly a bit late. — What difference *can* it make for a tennis-party,' she said, but, as they reached her door, Aldous answered with sharp utterance, 'Don't be silly. She's tired of waiting and we were to have started at four. — I'll give you five minutes.'

CHAPTER VII

DADDY always put her in the wrong for Cosima and, though she understood so well, muttering as she pulled off her shoes, 'He is just placating her,' Philippa felt angry tears rise to her eyes, so sharp — as sharp as his changed voice just now — was the contrast to the hour on the river just passed together. It hung there in her mind as she dressed, soft and sweet and golden, the canoe pushing its way among meadowsweet and loosestrife and willow-herb — 'like the river in "Alice Through the Looking-Glass," isn't it, Daddy,' she had said. — 'And there is the Wool and Water sheep looking at us.' And when they had seen the lovely tall bulrushes Daddy had said: 'Oh, we must get those for Cosima, Phil,' and it had been in the excitement of cutting them that the punt had tipped and Monty fallen in. Daddy had been really frightened and had cried: 'Good Heavens! — he's gone under!' There had been quite a moment of panic, making the bulrushes all the more precious and their unity all the more evident when, over Monty's muddy head, they had gasped relief at each other, and

Daddy had said: 'No, we won't stop to wash him, he's made us late already. — Don't tell Cosima he fell in, Phil. It would give her such a fright.' After this to be spoken to as if she had been in any way at fault was hard. 'I won't hurry in the least,' Philippa said to herself. 'I'll be quick, but I won't hurry.' And since the silk stockings just selected were too pink, she took them off and found a paler pair. 'If I'm to go to their party I'll go properly,' she said, choosing with deliberation her prettiest tennis dress, a white dress leaving her arms bare and falling to her knee in dense light pleats. She caught up her blue hat and blue jacket and ran downstairs to find Timmie, alone, awaiting her.

'They've gone! They've left you to me!' he announced. 'Cosima was nearly perished.'

'Splendid!' Philippa answered. 'I hate her big soft car: it bounces like a bubble and makes me feel giddy; — and do let us go like the wind and pass them, Timmie. — I'm not really late at all and I should love to pass them.' Though finding him a slightly contemptible absurdity, Philippa rather liked Timmie and settled herself in the alert little car with satisfaction.

'The trouble with darling Cosima,' said Timmie, as they turned out of the gate and sprang forward

along the highroad, 'is that she's of a jealous temperament. — But which of us worth our salt isn't? Don't you always suspect the flawless creatures who say they really *can't* understand jealousy, of being either too vain to love or too stupid to know themselves?'

'I quite agree,' said Philippa.

'Now I *am* vain, though you wouldn't think it possible,' Timmie went on, pleased with his venture, and while the fields and trees flew past, 'and though I can love — it isn't absorbingly. — I'm vain — though not proud — because I need vanity in order to bear up under my personal appearance; for I'm well aware that I look like nothing so much under the sun as a Middle-White pig.'

Philippa doubled over to laugh. 'But you are *very* shapely, Timmie,' she assured him.

'So is a Middle-White pig,' said Timmie, turning his small fat eye sagaciously upon her, and indeed it was exactly like a pig's. — 'And I have to recognise my type and emphasise it consciously in order to draw attention to the mind that faces and masters and makes a work of art of it. — You follow me?'

'Perfectly. But that's not vain. If you were vain you'd think it beautiful to be like a pig.'

'Well, between ourselves,' Timmie whispered, 'I

do think it rather beautiful. I rather, really and truly, admire pigs.'

'They're exceedingly intelligent looking; — and they have lovely eyelashes,' Philippa agreed.

And Timmie, closing his, remarked: 'You *have* noticed mine then?'

This was much more entertaining than rolling along with resentful Cosima, anxious Daddy, and penetrating Mrs. Cranley and, there the big car was, not so very far before them. — 'Oh — *do* let's pass them, Timmie! — *Do* go seventy miles an hour! You can, I know!' she cried, and, pressing the accelerator, Timmie obeyed her and in less than two minutes they whizzed past Cosima's reproachful chauffeur, Philippa, as they went, turning to raise a gay derisive hand at her father's startled face.

'Splendid!' she said. 'Don't let them get ahead of us. It'll be such fun to be waiting for them. I can't help liking to punish people who've been sulky. — What were you saying about jealousy, Timmie, and pride? Only horrid self-righteous people aren't jealous, I think. It's only pretending *not* to be that makes people behave so queerly; — pretending to yourself, I mean; because of course to other people you've *got* to pretend you don't care.'

'Precisely,' said Timmie. 'Pretending you don't

care to other people is a matter of pride; but pretending to yourself, in order to deceive yourself, is spiritual pride. I have neither; but you have a great deal of the first.'

'How can you *help* feeling jealous?' Philippa mused, 'if the one you care for most cares more for someone else?'

'You can't. You can't help it,' said Timmie. 'And when I should simply break down and beg them to remember that I was in agony, proud people, like you and Cosima, would pretend. People get very much mixed up about jealousy, because they usually think of it in sexual terms,' he went on, while Philippa listened with the composure of the modern girl. — 'I mean, they connect it with sexual emotion when as a matter of fact any human relation, as soon as it becomes love, displays it. Take the case of friends,' said Timmie; 'take two great friends who care for each other more than for anyone else. They do the same things and like the same things and at a concert their eyes meet each other's to see if they're feeling the music in the same way. Now let one of them — Harold — go to the concert expecting to listen to the symphony with Charles and let him find Charles quite absorbed in reading from the same score as Alexander. Charles

looks up, smiling, waves his hand, and goes on reading, glancing at Alexander from time to time to share delight. Is Harold pleased at finding Charles so happy, so well suited? No. He wishes Alexander were away and himself reading the score with Charles. He can hardly listen to the symphony for thinking of them and watching them. And if Charles, while professing to care as much as ever for Harold, always invites Alexander to be with them, the relation for Harold will be spoilt. And if it is finally made clear to him that both Charles and Alexander would rather he were away, he will suffer; now, won't he? He will suffer badly; and try to conceal it, if he is proud; for he knows that nothing alienates so much as a claim on waning affection; or, if he is weak, like me, he will break down and reproach Charles; with the inevitable result that their friendship is over. — Isn't this true?'

'Perfectly true, Timmie.' Philippa's eyes were fixed on the road. 'Only if Charles and Alexander do care most for each other, what's to be done?'

'The only thing to do, once you discern that Charles would rather you were away, is to fade out of the picture. You'll never, never, never really be wanted again,' said Timmie, and his small pig eyes

had a sad expression. 'Love doesn't keep people, and fidelity doesn't keep them, and trust doesn't keep them,' he said. 'Nothing keeps them, once they begin to go.'

'I think life is horribly sad and unfair,' said Philippa.

While they talked, while Timmie read his little parable and Philippa felt him rather a dear of a Middle-White, the fifteen miles were accomplished and outside the large gates of Nollekyns Park they drew up in the shade. 'You've had your way and we've been rather impudent,' said Timmie, 'taking the grievance out of Cosima's sails like this. My car is rather a sly-boots and I shall put it all on that. — I'm *very* fond of Cosima,' he said. 'There's no woman in London who dresses so divinely and I adore pretty clothes. — Here they come and we'll let them precede us now in decency and order.'

Philippa was glad when she saw the distances of the park, the grey gabled façade of the house, the ranged glitter of waiting cars, that she had put on her prettiest dress. Cosima was standing in the doorway with her father and Mrs. Cranley and kept up her air of distance as they were led across a great hall, filled with flowers and books and portraits, to a terrace leading down to a lawn where, in

the shade of cedars and beeches, scattered groups of people sat happily disposed. Their hostess rose from one and came to welcome them, a tall, kind, girlish woman who kissed Mrs. Cranley and smiled upon Cosima, leading them all into the shade to where her husband, quite an old man, holding a green-and-white sunshade over his shoulder, sat beside a lady who looked all the fairer, the bluer-eyed, for her black attire; and as seats were drawn forward and names uttered, this lady looked up at Cosima, smiling very slightly, and said: 'But of course Mrs. Brandon and I have met.'

'Mrs. Wyntringham,' Lady Frobisher made haste to assure her, 'and Mr. Wyntringham, and this is Miss Wyntringham,' and Philippa suddenly, as she saw them all looking at her, thought of Mummie sitting in the inexpensive lodgings by the sea with Grannie and Billy, and surmised that in her own importance to this occasion lay an aspect of dark disloyalty. Did the fair lady see her as disloyal? Her blue eyes scanned and scanned her.

'Do come and have some tea. — You're going to play tennis, aren't you?' said the daughter of the house, and Philippa and her father and Timmie were led away, leaving Cosima to face a situation that must have its special difficulties. 'After all,'

thought Philippa, though the thought did not sweeten her self-distaste, 'Mummie in the cottage is perhaps the better off of the two.' And that Daddy had noted and understood she could see from his brittle smile, as, on the other side of the tea-table, he stood talking to a girl in black and white who reminded her of something, who even, as their eyes met, smiled over at her with definite intention.

'This is Challoner Day,' said Pamela Frobisher, pouring out the tea, and the tall young man thus introduced passed the sandwiches, but Philippa was still absorbed by Cosima and the blue-eyed lady. They knew each other yet were not sitting side by side; and if this was so it was because the blue-eyed lady saw to it that they did not. She was smiling ever so brightly and confidently at old Lord Frobisher, and yet a cool little stream seemed to flow from and encircle her, dividing her from Cosima; onlookers might not know it was there, but Cosima would. Lady Frobisher was talking to Cosima and two men were being presented to her, yet Philippa divined that all was not well with her because of the blue-eyed lady and her dividing stream.

'You know, I think we've met before,' said Challoner Day — and it was a queer name and

suited him, for it was cool and bright and clear, and under the canopy of the cedar-tree there was something almost ethereal in his aspect; — 'or, at all events, I've met your father — and seen you; in Kensington Gardens; last summer; when my sister and I were walking with our dogs. — But you wouldn't remember.'

'But I do remember,' she said. 'They were called Jack and Dominic. Are they here?'

'No; they're in America. They'll never be here again — it's rather sad, isn't it — because of your quarantine.'

'Are they in the country? Do you live in America in the country?'

'Yes. They're in the country; and we live there, and in New York. We're Americans,' said Challoner, and now, her attention diverted from Cosima, she was remembering him more and more clearly as she had first seen him, his very fair bright head under the trees, as he had doffed his hat, and that affectionateness in his voice as he spoke to the dogs, and in his smile as he had looked at her and Daddy; Daddy so unaware of him. There was something very gentle about him, and very secure. Glancing up at his grey eyes, she felt him so secure that nothing could ever make him ungentle. One must be

very strong to be so gentle, and yet there was the ethereal look as if, in the shade of the cedar, he were made of transparent alabaster; and the hand, now passing her the cake, was almost fragile.

'Where did you meet Daddy?' she asked him. It was his sister, of course, who was talking on the other side of the table to Daddy, and the lady with the blue eyes was, of course, his mother.

'In France. In Touraine. Some years ago,' he said. 'He was with the friend you've just come with.' He looked over at Cosima.

'Oh. Yes.' Philippa's thoughts raced vividly. 'She's my stepmother now.'

'Oh, is she? — Well,' said Challoner easily, 'we met her before that, too — years and years ago when Alison and I were children, in Rome. I've forgotten all about it, except that I was lost on the Campagna. Let me see; — she knows a lot about butterflies, doesn't she?'

'Butterflies? Cosima? I don't think so.'

'I don't know why I associate her with a black-and-white butterfly; — except that she's rather like one.'

'She always dresses in black-and-white' — they were both looking at Cosima who, large-eyed, smiled her sweet, drowning smile up at a group of

attentive men — 'but I don't feel about her that she's easily crushed.'

'No? Well, a butterfly's pretty elusive, isn't it? — Are you going to be my partner? I don't know your name yet, only that you're Miss Wyntringham.'

'Philippa's my name, and you are Chal, aren't you?'

'Now, how did you know that?' he smiled.

'I can't think. — Daddy must have said it in the Park.'

As they went towards the tennis-court, Chal asked her whether she had been to Touraine and she said no, only once to Paris, and that her dream was to travel with Daddy and see castles and cathedrals. 'Because I want to be an architect,' she said.

'So do I!' said Chal. 'I'm studying to be an architect now; — that *is* a bond, you know!'

'What with butterflies and dogs and architecture we seem to have all sorts of bonds!' Philippa laughed, and she wished his mother hadn't been so horrid to Cosima. It was just the sort of thing that Grannie would have done, for of course she had known that Cosima was Mrs. Brandon no longer, and however much you disapproved of people you

shouldn't try to punish them at tea-parties. Chal would simply have hated it, but Grannie would have been pleased. 'I don't want to build workmen's cottages,' she said. 'I want to build lovely houses, like this one.'

'I want to build cathedrals,' Chal declared.

'Are you studying at the Beaux Arts? — in Paris? — That's where I want to go.'

'That's where I was going; but my father died, last year,' said Chal, 'so I am staying in America to be near my mother and Alison.'

On the tennis-court she found that she and Chal were playing against Daddy and Pamela. Timmie was already active on a neighbouring court, and Philippa whispered: 'Do you think he looks like a Middle-White pig? He's a friend of mine and very amusing.'

'Well, since you suggest it — though I don't identify the breed ——' Chal smiled, and Philippa said: '*He* suggested it. There's no disloyalty.'

Poor darling Daddy on the other side of the net still kept his brittle smile. He was still feeling unhappy about Cosima, but Chal would soon melt that small obstacle. She felt that she would back Chal to melt anything as she watched him greet her father. 'What lovely places we always seem to

meet in, sir; Fontevrault and Kensington Gardens, and now here.' To hear Daddy called 'sir' made him seem very reverend. Her own hardness towards him had melted as she and Timmie flew past him in the car, and she said to him now, the net between them: 'I'm going to punish you most frightfully for making me dress so fast! You know I'm the champion at Eastbury.'

'And I taught you everything you know; — pride goes before a fall!' her father retorted.

'Not this kind of pride! Only spiritual pride! Timmie says I haven't a grain of that. — Daddy, Chal is going to be an architect, too, and to build cathedrals.'

'Why cathedrals?' Aldous asked, and Chal said: 'Why not, sir?'

Daddy never quite liked to be beaten, even by her, and it was soon evident that he and Pamela were outmatched. She was better than Pamela, and Chal was better than any of them. Ethereal as he might look, he was all steel and swiftness, and as he and Philippa sprang and ran and crouched and crossed each other, happy smiles of confident triumph passed between them, and poor Daddy's tenseness grew, struggling against his pride in her prowess.

'I'm so sorry,' he said at the end of the two sets, to Pamela — and they were beaten in both of them; — 'I'm getting too old and that's the truth.'

'But you play splendidly!' cried kind Pamela, flushed and happy in defeat. 'It's only that Philippa and Chal together would be too much for any other couple here. — That serve of yours, Chal, is the most fiendish I ever stood up against. — Come, shall we have a rest and some lemonade?'

Daddy's dejection maintained its frosty Celtic edge. 'Why should he mind?' thought Philippa. 'Why not be happy about it — like Pamela?'

Chal asked her if she would not like to see the water-garden before going back for lemonade and, as they walked away over the grass, she thought: 'Old and brittle, poor darling, and I ought to have played with *him*, really; — we might have won — in spite of Chal's service. — Why do you want to build cathedrals?' she asked. 'No one wants them any longer.'

'Perhaps they will when they see mine!' said Chal.

'I've seen most of the English cathedrals as well as Notre-Dame; of course they're lovely,' said Philippa, 'but I feel I'd give them all for the Parthenon.'

'That's quite as it should be,' Chal smiled. 'You look, when you play tennis, like a figure from the frieze of the Parthenon come to life.' He had not at all the air of paying compliments. His tone was almost professional, and Philippa listened, gratified but disinterested, as he went on, glancing at her: 'And it's wonderful to see a girl nowadays whose mouth isn't painted. — Most girls' mouths come into a room two yards ahead of their faces.'

'I know. That's why I don't do it. But everybody likes it.'

'It's funny about fashions, isn't it? Once they've passed, people see how silly they've been,' said Chal, and they turned into a shady descending path. 'I suppose the point is to pay no attention to them unless one really likes them; — to be independent, like you.'

'But if one is too independent one is outside everything. I've often thought of that,' said Philippa.

'If you stay outside long enough, you change the fashion, perhaps.'

'No; fashions are only changed by the people who stay inside,' said Philippa. 'My mouth won't change the lipstick fashion. It'll be the mouths of

the girls who paint and get tired of it. — *What* a divine place!'

They had come out into the open where, with trees above and fields beyond, a brook ran broadly among flat stones and fell from ledge to ledge, bossed, freaked, bordered with flowers. 'I never saw such a heavenly water-garden!'

They sat down on the rustic bench placed for contemplation and looked in silence at the picture contrived for them. It was as various and delicate and bright as the foreground of a primitive Italian painting. 'All the same,' said Philippa after a little while, 'I don't really and truly care much about gardens and all the arranging. — I mean, I'm very glad this is here for us to see; but what I'd love best would be to find the brook in a wood with only the flowers that belong to it.'

'You'd like our New England brooks and woods,' he said, leaning his chin on his hand and looking at the water. 'I like brooks best, found by chance, too. Everything is nicer found.'

'What sort of flowers do you have over there? Like ours?'

'Some of them. But a great many different. There's trailing arbutus, under the snow, first of all; lovely, that is; more found than any other flower;

for you have to brush away the snow to see it. — Strong shining dark green leaves and woody creeping stems and deliciously smelling pink flowers; a miracle. And where we live in the country there are blue gentians in the lower meadows and red columbines in the woods, and, higher up on the mountainside, sheets of mountain laurel, growing under the pine trees among the rocks. That's perhaps the loveliest of all; you call it kalmia here, but it doesn't grow wild; and it's the wildest of all things with us; the buds a strong, cold pink, and each open flower-cup architecturally constructed; the stamens are like little buttresses fixing each petal. Alison and I have a log cabin of our very own on the mountain — a mile from the house; and ever since we were small we've been allowed to go up there with our horses and keep house and cook for ourselves and sleep; so that it's in our very blood and bones; sunrise among the pines and the hermit-thrush and the laurel. — Too lovely,' said Chal, turning his grey eyes on her with their cool sweet smile. 'I wish you could see it some day. Perhaps your father will bring you over.'

She looked at him and smiled back. It seemed as remote as a tale of the Hesperides, so remote that there was no need to answer such a fantasy; and her new friend, already in a sense so near, was in an-

other as far away. His colour, his structure, like that of the mountain laurel, strong and delicate, was different; his voice — with an oddity in the deliberate rhythm of his speech, a slight hesitation before decisive words giving them a greater emphasis — seemed to remove him to another epoch and make him, like the country he described, remote and conjectural. 'You are not at all like what I imagined Americans to be,' she said, looking at him carefully with her slight smile.

'And you're not like what I imagined English girls,' he returned.

'Why not?'

'You're so much more confident, but you're not daring. You're not shy and you're not daring; you're merely confident.'

'I've always thought of Americans as on railroads or in skyscrapers, somehow — or else cowboys among buffaloes. — Not as very civilised and looking at the sunrise.'

'There are lots of us, all the same,' he smiled, 'and I don't believe there are lots of you.'

'I hope not! — I hope there are very few of *both* of us! I don't like great numbers of anything — do you?'

'Well, it depends. — I like stars and flowers and

birds,' Chal mildly enumerated — 'all the things we get in great numbers on our mountains; — even with people, it's better to have numbers of satisfactory rather than numbers of unsatisfactory girls. — But of course one wants people to be different; like cathedrals. — Now why do you feel you like the Parthenon best?'

'Is it because it's so reasonable? There's something a little silly sometimes, I think, about Gothic cathedrals. — I like reasonable things best.'

'No, you don't; you like brooks best. — But I know quite well what you mean,' said Chal. 'Of course you are always in danger if you leave reason behind. Gothic art is always in danger of being foolish, I suppose, just as a prayer is in danger of being more foolish than a thought.'

'I don't know much about prayer,' said Philippa. She was looking again at Chal's eyes and feeling that they had seen sad but never dark things. — 'Perhaps he's suffered,' she thought, 'but he's never suffocated. — Is a Gothic cathedral like a prayer?'

'Yes. Wait till you see Chartres.'

'I see what you mean. And the Parthenon is like a thought, I suppose.'

'Yes; one implies itself and returns upon itself

and completes its own meaning while the other implies far more than it can express. — Do you live near here with your father and stepmother?' he asked.

'Well, we've just come to live near here, for my holidays; but Cosima lives in London.'

'May I come over for another game of tennis to-morrow? We're going away on Monday and back to America very soon.'

'Oh — do come,' said Philippa — 'Though —' her eyes sounded his comprehension — 'I don't think,' she found, 'that your mother likes my stepmother.'

'Well,' Chal flushed slightly but kept calm eyes upon her, 'what if she doesn't? — You're not responsible for your stepmother, are you?'

'I'm responsible for being with her, don't you think?' And here, amazingly, she found herself back at this problem with a friend who had been a stranger when that self-distaste had come upon her hardly more than an hour before. 'Do you think it's wrong to go and live with your father when you love him best?' she asked.

'How do you mean? How can it be wrong?'

'If your mother is still there and wants you just as much as he does.'

He gazed at her for a moment. 'Your mother isn't dead?'

'No. Of course she isn't dead. Didn't you know? That's why your mother disapproves of Cosima.'

'You mean they're divorced? I didn't know; but I expect my mother does.'

'Yes. He fell in love with Cosima and Mummie set him free. — It's dreadful,' said Philippa, speaking with a sudden quickness, and in a low voice, as though they might be overheard. — 'It's dreadful when your father and mother are divorced. It cuts your life in two.'

'It must be dreadful.'

'And it makes *you* dreadful,' Philippa went on, her eyes on his. 'Because you have to hate somebody. — I don't hate Cosima for herself; — at least I think not; but I hate her for him; not only because of Mummie; but because of myself: — do you understand that?'

'Of course I do,' said Chal, contemplating her. 'I'm not sure you ought to be with her,' he added after a moment.

'But what can I do! I must be with Daddy! We need each other! We're miserable without each other.'

'Yes. But he ought to have thought of that.'

'But he never dreamed it would mean giving me up.'

'No' — Chal hesitated; 'but oughtn't he to have dreamed it? — because, if she wants you as much as he does, isn't it too hard on your mother?' he brought out, hesitating.

Suddenly Philippa covered her face with her hands. It was not that tears had come; but as Chal spoke the words, she felt herself so flash with realisation that she had to be alone with it. She had seen it dimly when she had come to-day to this place of beauty into which Cosima entered because of her own apostasy, and now she saw it like a ribbon of lightning across a dark sky, sharp and glittering. 'It's true,' she said to herself as well as to him. 'We've taken everything from her; — everything; except Billy. — But I can't go back to her because I love him best. I suffocate away from Daddy. — You've never suffocated, Chal. — And one must be with the one one loves best. — Isn't he calling now?' She rose, dropping her hands and turning her eyes on Chal with a startled look as if seeing him there with surprise.

'Yes. I think he's calling you.' Chal sat on for another moment looking up at her. '*She* must be suffocating — if she's lost everything she loves best.'

'Yes. Yes. There it is, Chal.' — They were walking now quickly away from the brook. '*Someone* has to suffocate. If Daddy hadn't gone to Cosima — he and she would have suffocated. Isn't it all dreadful! Isn't life horribly sad and unfair! — Because of course poor darling Mummie is much better than any of us, and more loving — Hello, hello!' she called, answering the approaching voice. — 'And do come to-morrow because I can talk to you about it and there is no one else far enough away to talk to. — You know what I mean. — Here we are, Daddy!' she called again.

'Where does your mother live?' Chal was walking beside her over the grass, pondering.

'In London. Are you ever in London? Do come and see me sometimes there, at Mummie's.'

'That's what I was thinking. If you made new friends and cared for them, it would be giving her something instead of taking something away; even if it were something very unimportant,' said Chal. 'Mothers always like to share things with their children.'

'Oh, how darling of you! It's just what she *would* love. We'll talk about it to-morrow. — There's Daddy — looking dreadfully put out.'

Aldous was coming hastily and his smile was a

mere form. 'My dear child — where have you been hiding yourself?' These were not his words. He was echoing Cosima and Cosima was angrier than ever.

'But Daddy — I'm not hiding,' said Philippa.

'I've been looking everywhere. It's almost seven and Cosima is very tired.'

'But why didn't she go home? I could have come with Timmie.' Philippa was aware that this little altercation carried on as they walked swiftly towards the house must reveal many things to Chal, but she could not leave Cosima's manœuvres unexposed. 'If she was tired, Daddy, why didn't she go home? It isn't fair of her to say I was hiding. Why should I have hidden? We came to a party and I was enjoying it.'

'It's all my fault, mine entirely,' said Chal, walking beside them while Philippa had the strangest feeling that he would not desert her however wrong he knew her to be; — and of course it was wrong to discredit Cosima and make the sharp red mount to her father's cheek; 'I wanted her to see the water-garden and I talked and talked to her.'

Aldous cast a cold glance upon him. 'My wife is not strong. We've kept her waiting once already to-day. — Mrs. Cranley has gone in Timmie's car,

Philippa, and Cosima was ready half an hour ago. You must consider others a little in your enjoyment.'

'You see, I'm frightfully selfish, Chal,' said Philippa, smiling round at her new friend.

CHAPTER VIII

'HE'S a perfect treasure, Daddy. I never met anyone I liked so much,' said Philippa. She and her father and Cosima were rolling through the evening in the big car, and she had triumphantly kept up her air of happy unconcern. Daddy might feel it rather impudent of her, yet at bottom he would be grateful for the foothold it gave them both, since he could not pretend unconcern before Cosima's deadly silence. Philippa had taken one of the small folding seats and sat sideways to them and she could turn her face to smile at her father without seeing Cosima; and however vexed Daddy might be with her, however much he might suspect her of impudence, it was really Cosima who had put herself in the wrong. The silent person with a grievance is never popular.

'You seemed to like him very much indeed,' said Aldous. Philippa had liked Chal so very much that her instinct in other circumstances would have been to keep silence about him. But now, as she saw her father forced to offer her up on the altar of Cosima's ill-temper, came an impish desire to display her immunity. She was happy in the evening sunlight,

and the irradiating sense of the new friendship strengthened within her an almost maternal feeling of indulgence. 'There's nothing really remarkable, is there, Daddy, in liking a perfectly charming young man you meet at a party and having a talk with him?' she said. 'I'd no idea you wanted to go home so early. Lots of people are there still, and Pamela said she and Alison were going to play till eight. It's just the time of year one wants to play as late as possible.'

'You forget we've fifteen miles to go. — Who is Alison?'

'That pet of a girl you were talking to at tea: his sister. — Is the mother as nice as she looks, Daddy? And was the father nice? He died last year, you know. That's why they were all in half-mourning.'

'I really know nothing about them,' said Aldous, his arms folded, his eyes fixed on the landscape. 'I only saw them for a few moments when we met them in France.'

'Yes; Chal said they met you and Cosima in Touraine — and Cosima, when he was quite little, in Rome; and he said she knew a lot about butterflies. — I didn't know you were interested in butterflies, Cosima.' To this Cosima made no reply, and Philippa did not turn her head towards her, know-

ing without seeing her that her shafts had struck home.

Her father, too, sat silent.

'I didn't know Americans were like that,' Philippa pursued, swinging the tassel of the window-strap. 'There's an American girl at Eastbury, very nice and sweet, but rather insipid and satin-lined.'

'That accurately defines my impression of your Chal's young sister.'

'Oh! Daddy, you were liking her awfully! I saw how you were liking her! — *He* isn't satin-lined at all events! He's lined with mountain laurel and you have to brush back the snow to find him. — It sounded lovely where they live in the country. And he's going to be an architect, too, Daddy. I've quite decided to be one now and to go to the Beaux Arts after I've left Oxford. Daddy — you simply *must* take me to France next year.'

'Meanwhile,' came Cosima's voice from behind her, 'please don't destroy my car'; and dropping the tassel Philippa murmured blandly: 'Oh; sorry. — Daddy, we ought to have a little two-seater like Timmie's. You must get one when your book comes out. Cosima's car is much too grand for working people like you and me. — You must help me roll

the tennis-court before breakfast to-morrow because Chal is coming to play tennis.'

It was hardly more than half-past seven when River House was reached, but in a voice of dusty fatigue Cosima said to the butler that dinner must be adjourned. Aldous followed her as she went swiftly up the stairs and his transit to his dressing-room was arrested as, sinking down before her mirror, throwing off her hat, stripping the rings from her fingers, she said: 'I'm very sorry, Aldous, but I can't receive the satin-lined youth here.'

Aldous made his pause and then walked on. He had learned that to keep silence until the onslaught defined itself saved time. He went into his room and left the door open.

'You heard and saw what happened, of course,' Cosima went on, raising her voice, that now slightly trembled.

'I noticed that Mrs. Day had not heard that we were married,' said Aldous after a moment.

'Hadn't heard! It was just what she had done. She's heard all about it from Daisy Brock, of course; — how should she not? And I confess that it hurt me, hurt me horribly, that after she had insulted me, you and Philippa should have chosen to spend the afternoon hobnobbing with her children.'

'Philippa knew nothing about it. She didn't know he was her son. As for me, I only saw the girl at tea. Don't be absurd, Cosima; you're tired and on edge.'

'Tired and on edge! I am, indeed!' Cosima had taken her brush and was brushing, brushing at her hair, not seeing what she did in her bitter absorption. 'Because you don't care what happens to me! You don't care how helpless or exposed I am so long as you and Philippa are enjoying yourselves! I was left there to face that odious woman until she turned her back on me and went into the house!'

'I came and had a look at you after tennis and you were talking perfectly happily. Lord Frobisher took me round the stables. A very innocuous form of enjoyment, you must own. As for Mrs. Day, you exaggerate: there may have been a touch of malice; but after all, she belongs to the world of convention, Cosima, and you repudiate it. You mustn't be too squeamish.'

She sat silent for a moment, and as he moved to and fro he saw that she had laid down her brush and was staring at herself in the mirror. 'Ring for Pratt and get ready,' he said. When Pratt came he could close his door.

'You mean that I have no right to sensitiveness?' she said, sitting still. 'Thank you. The reminder comes strangely from you — for whom I endure all this.'

'Cosima, I do beg of you. — It's nearly dinner-time. Wait till the evening's over if you want to make a scene. We have your guests to face down-stairs.'

'And your child! I must face her, too, and I need look for no mercy from her. Very well. I will get ready. Only you must tell her that I will not receive Challoner Day.'

'That's absurd. That's impossible. She asked him to come.'

'Of course she asked him! She ignores me and my feelings completely, as we know. But I hold the place of hostess here, whatever I may be in fact, and I will not receive him. If Philippa is so intent on pursuing her flirtation, take her over there to-morrow and let them sit all day by the river! It's not pretty, I may say, to see a child of her age setting her cap so conspicuously at the millionaire. — No other girl there had a chance at him!'

At this, quietly and decisively, Aldous shut his door; but Cosima sprang and flung it open. 'What do you mean! — Shutting me out! Taking her part

against me, always! Oh! I see how it will end!' Her eyes were strained in a look of terror.

He saw the terror through the frenzied, childish anger and his sick tenderness for her enabled him to master his own anger. 'My poor Cosima,' he said, 'try to control yourself. — You talk of insults and you insult Philippa. — The kindest thing to think is that you don't know what you are saying.'

She stood in the doorway gazing wildly at him, her little face strangely bare with all the hair brushed back, and suddenly she broke into sobs and fell on his breast. 'Oh, Aldous — I've been too miserable! All day! Too, too miserable! — Tell me that you love me!'

'My poor, foolish child — I've taken your part all day against Philippa — even when I felt you, as she must have done, absurd, unreasonable. There, I don't mean to reproach you. — But you mustn't allow yourself to say outrageous things. I can't bear that, you know.' He caressed her; her head was pressed closely against his breast; her arms clung round him; he caressed her and kissed her wet cheek, but his voice was stern; and she checked her sobs to listen to him and then wept again helplessly: 'Forgive me! Forgive your foolish child — you know it is only foolishness. — I am so tired!

She's hurt me so! I am always afraid of her and of what she's meaning. — And I was so frightened there at tea — that woman's eyes — before them all! — It was like walking forward against spears!'

'My poor darling; no one cared. No one cared a fig for Mrs. Day's eyes!'

'I did! I couldn't bear it! She meant to stab and wound! — They're the cruellest things in the world — those women! They'd drop you overboard and watch you sink without a qualm — and all because they play old-fashioned bridge and you win at contract! That's all it comes to! A different code! Well — thank God — we've done with them and their code! — They're as dead, really, as the dodo!' — and Cosima laughed hysterically.

And Aldous laughed, pressing back the hair from her forehead and kissing its silvery arch.

'You won't let her trample on me, will you?' she smiled closely into his eyes. 'You won't make me have him here when his mother's tried to drown me! — Oh, Aldous — don't ask it of me!'

He stared above her head, wanly grimacing in his perplexity. 'What difference does it make? — with these young people nowadays. They have their independent friendships. How can we put him

off now? It's so much better to ignore it, Cosima.'

'It's not ignoring; — it's accepting. It's letting her put me into the category of the women your son visits, but you don't. — That's the code; — don't you see it? — All you need do, darling, is write him a note and have it taken over the first thing to-morrow to say you're so sorry to find that your wife has made an engagement for Philippa. — It's quite simple, Aldous. You need say nothing to Philippa until it's done.'

'I shouldn't think of writing to him without telling her. — You really mean me to tell Philippa that his mother insulted you?'

Her brows drew together in passionate impatience. 'You need tell her nothing. Except that we can't receive him. She was there. She saw it happen. She'll need no explanations. She understands, far, far better than you do, what these things mean.'

He stood, within her insistent arms, turning his eyes away, bitterly uncertain. 'I'll talk to her to-morrow morning. We were going to roll the court before breakfast. I'll talk to her then. — There's the gong. — You can hardly come down as you are.'

'No. I can't. Most certainly I can't. Say that I

have a headache.' Her eyes still searched his face. 'Promise me to protect me.'

'Don't be absurd, Cosima,' he said, turning and leaving the room.

CHAPTER IX

PHILIPPA looked like the dawn, coming down from the house over the grass in her blue-and-white dress. Above her head the sky was blue-and-white; thick white mist was folded on the river and floated in transparent streams over the meadows. The day at this early hour was miraculously young and fresh, and Philippa was part of it. Something of dark distaste mingled with his mood as he watched her come, remembering Cosima's languid scented head and clinging arms. She had asked for no further promise, sleeping, in her weariness, so closely against him; but, when he had risen to leave her, she had opened her dark eyes in a long look and her arms had folded round his neck, reminding him. She did not need to remind him. She embodied it all. She was like a clotted rhythm, sweet and suffocating, to which his life was forced, and to see Philippa was to feel himself flow with almost intolerable gladness into the freedom of old cadences, and to feel — the dark thought came — subtly tainted before his child. How strange it was to know — he had no time to repel the terrible dis-

loyalty of the thought — that, if he had been free, he would have withdrawn Philippa from any contact with Cosima.

'Darling child,' he said after she had lightly kissed him — on his forehead, on the tip of his nose, on his lips — 'I really wanted a little talk. Let the rolling wait. Come, down to the river — so that we'll be quite alone.'

Cosima was at once in Philippa's mind. She knew that something was amiss. Arm in arm they walked through the dewy grass.

'Darling,' said Aldous — they had reached the little river path, waist-high in meadowsweet and willow-herb and he held her arm closely and did not look at her — 'we understand each other very well, you and I, don't we?'

Philippa's heart began to thump. Perhaps, then, it wasn't Cosima. Perhaps he was going to speak of their situation, of Mummie, of what he had done to their old life; and a far-away phrase floated strangely to her mind and fixed itself there: 'One flesh.' 'Yes; we do,' she said.

'You'll know that it's difficult for me, sometimes,' said Aldous, and she felt, not looking at him, that his mind laboured at the task before it. 'And not make it more so.'

'Yes, Daddy. — (It's Cosima,' she thought. 'I understand and she doesn't.')

'Then, darling, don't be annoyed with me if I ask you to give up having that young man here to-day.'

She walked on, quietly; but she put compulsion upon herself not to stop short, so great was the shock. 'Don't you like him, Daddy?' she said presently.

'I hardly saw him,' said her father, 'but he seemed a pleasant enough young fellow. A little too sure of himself, perhaps; a little too beaming — to my jaded British eye. — But it's nothing to do with my likes or dislikes. It's his mother who made things rather unpleasant for Cosima yesterday. You see, dear child, owing to what she's braved for my sake, her position is not always an easy one.'

'You mean she and his mother don't like each other?'

'I mean more than that. I'm afraid Mrs. Day was deliberately offensive. She hurt Cosima and she meant to hurt her.'

'I think it was only,' said Philippa after a moment while, deeply, she took counsel with herself, 'that Mrs. Day doesn't like divorced people.'

'That sort of dislike has no business to express

itself as hers did yesterday. If she feels so strongly that she can't behave suitably, her son ought not to come. Because Cosima and I are the kind of people she dislikes.'

'But, Daddy, if he doesn't mind and if I don't mind, what difference does it make? It's he and I who are concerned, not you and Cosima. It's only me he's coming to see.'

'I know. But it's my home; and Cosima's. She would, technically, be receiving him.' — Aldous was surprised to find himself such an apt exponent of Cosima's case.

'No; I should. This is your house, and I'm your daughter. — That's just the beauty of it. Oh, Daddy — he's going back to America. I *should* like to see him again!'

'You don't know him, Philippa dear. You've only just met him. You really can't care one way or the other.' Aldous spoke with a slight terseness.

'I do care, most dreadfully,' said Philippa, and tears rose to her eyes surprising herself. 'I like him more than anyone I ever met.'

She was aware, in the silence that followed this, of a faint stiffening that went through her father, a thin glaze of ice breathed over a pool, and her mind, arming itself swiftly in a woman's resource, supple-

ness, secrecy, she thought: 'He doesn't like me to care so much. It makes him uncomfortable. He wants me to be only his and not to care for anyone but him.' And she did care most for Daddy, of course, and could she demonstrate it more clearly than in giving up Chal for his sake — giving up Chal to gratify Cosima's sick and selfish whim? Daddy would see that it was sick and selfish. 'Does she want me to wire to him?' she said as her father kept silence.

'I think that would be best. He'll want to make other plans if not coming here. — Philippa darling — I can't tell you how grateful I am.'

She saw in his face, half-astonished with relief, how grateful, and her own heart was strangely light. All was well; so much more well than Daddy could know. 'The sooner it goes the better, then, Daddy. — I could write him a little note, too, to make it more polite.'

'Of course, my darling; he's a charming young fellow. I've nothing to say against him.'

'Shall I say that Cosima has made another engagement for me?'

'Exactly that, darling. That's exactly what Cosima suggested.'

'Did she?' They were walking back swiftly, al-

most with a pace of elation, to the house, and still arm in arm. Up the steps to the open drawing-room window they went, and at the writing-table Philippa drew out the telegraph forms and wrote, her father leaning over her:

'So dreadfully sorry find my stepmother has made another engagement for me writing.

'PHILIPPA'

'Admirable, darling,' he said, taking it and going with it to the bell. 'Now shall we have a little time on the river?'

'First my note, Daddy. — Oh, Horton, just a moment! Here's a telegram to have sent; — and wait till I give you this note to be posted. — Get out the canoe, Daddy,' Philippa smiled clearly up at her father. 'This must go in time to reach him before he leaves. — I'll be with you in two minutes.' And her father, leaving her, all trust and gratitude, Horton waiting with the telegram, she wrote:

'Dear Chal — Cosima finds that I must do something else and I'm sure you think that if one consents to live with a stepmother one oughtn't to displease her. It's too difficult, I believe, to have

friends with a stepmother; but Mummie is there, as you said, and here is her address, and don't forget, when next you come to England, that I shall be wanting to hear about cathedrals and American scenery.

'Yours affectionately PHILIPPA'

And, her heart not able quite to master its childishness, she added a quick postscript: 'I'm *frightfully* disappointed.'

CHAPTER X

'TOADS! Hateful toads!' ejaculated Cosima. She sat behind her tea-table in the black-and-silver drawing-room, a slanting branch of white lilac behind her lovely head and in her hands a sheaf of press-cuttings. Aldous, on the other side of the table, drank his tea with a pretence at indifference, and on the arm of his chair Philippa reclined in school dress, resting her arm above her father's head. The early spring afternoon was foggy, the lights were on, and in the soft effusion Philippa's eyes looked black and Cosima knew that they dwelt on her with a coldly shining penetration. 'It's really too bad!' she said, pouting her lips in wifely repudiation.

Aldous's book was out and was not a success. Better for it, perhaps, had its scientific theme lapped it in a sheltering obscurity, for, shot through with capricious æsthetic appraisals and oddities of biographical allusion, it was attracting ironic and hostile attention, and Cosima, feeling her own heart sunken, gauged accurately Aldous's shrinking from the publicity of his failure. Philippa gauged it too. She and Philippa, as always, knew exactly what

Aldous was feeling, and something blithely immune in the girl's attitude sharpened still further her own impulse to perfidious pity.

'After all, Daddy, to be abused at such length is already a compliment,' Philippa commented, glancing at the long slip down which Cosima's distressful eyes travelled. 'You've made them thoroughly angry, at all events.'

'Oh — there's no compliment indicated, I'm afraid, not even an inverted one' — Cosima shook her clustering head. 'He is seizing the opportunity to air all his own theories while he sets you right on technical points — as if he were a schoolmaster and you a pretentious little boy. He *is* important, I suppose, and knows his job; but however big you are' — and Cosima's mouth pouted still further in repudiation — 'I can't see why you should employ a lash. — It's *too* bad! — "Mr. Wyntringham's borrowed plumage, however brilliant, will not persuade us that he has hatched a living bird!" — Toad!' Cosima repeated.

Aldous sat silent, his crossed foot wagging a little, and raised his cup to his lips with a hand held steady, and as Cosima laid down the slip and began on the next one, Philippa leaned forward and picked it up.

'It's not so bad as all that, Daddy,' she said presently. 'Cosima rather underlines the terrors. He *is* angry, I think. You've made him angry — rather as if he *were* the schoolmaster and you a schoolboy Shelley. He's frightfully riled by all that part about rhythms that you and I like so much. — Read it, Daddy, for yourself.'

'I've not the least wish to read it, my dear,' said Aldous, helping himself to cake, which he never ate. 'I'm absolutely indifferent to what the critics say or don't say!'

'Don't be childish, Aldous darling,' Cosima murmured, her eyes on the second slip. Philippa with her talk of Shelley made her angry. 'We can stand up to a slating, can't we, Shelleys though we be.'

'You seem to take it hard,' said Aldous.

'Take it hard? What do you mean?' Cosima lifted her eyes at that. They rested, as they seemed always of late to rest, on her husband and his child, united, against her; and Aldous, making no reply, drank his tea and leaned forward to smile at Monty and drop a bit of the cake into his expectant mouth. — 'Oh, please! — Please, Aldous! — You know he's far too fat already. — Monty, come here at once!' She lifted Monty to her side and bent her

face down to his head, feeling her unstable blood mounting to her throat, the treacherous tears to her eyes. How could a wife not take it hard — seeing her husband made ridiculous? He muttered something now while she kept her face down against Monty's head, and Philippa, a slight smile fixed on her face, took up the second slip. Philippa pretended not to mind; but she did mind. And she should be made to realise that the Daddy she fawned on and flattered was not so effulgent a figure as she imagined. No one could love Aldous as she herself did, since she loved him in spite of deficiencies so clearly recognised, and it was insufferable that the child should constantly belittle her devotion by pretending to ignore them. That was what Philippa was always doing, always belittling her in Aldous's eyes, surreptitiously, subterraneanly, by means they both deeply understood, but of which silly Aldous remained unaware. Let her love him by all means; but see him — good Heavens! thought Cosima, while the blood throbbed behind her ears and a feeling of weakness crept through her limbs — as he really is; a great dear; undoubtedly very intelligent, and with a savour of his own; but utterly unimportant. It was a word that had often returned to her of late as she watched Philippa's

sycophancy, and the reception of his book fixed an objective reality upon the hidden comment.

There the hateful girl sat — no longer a child; that fact, already so very evident last summer at River House, had been made more so during the winter from which they had just emerged. What Lorrimer had said was true; men went down like ninepins before her and she was well aware of her power. It was true that she was not yet out and showed no desire to thrust herself to the front of the stage; but it was as if, when she was there, life tended to gather away from the footlights, where Cosima gracefully displayed herself, round the smiling figure loitering in the wings. She was gay, she was indifferent and selfish; she never tried to charm, chattering of the things that interested her and more pleased to catch her father's applauding eye than to win the suffrages of her attendant swains; but they all clustered round her in the back-drawing-room, while, absorbed in each new interest, she twanged the guitar her father had given her, or fed the new lizard in the aquarium, or blew soap-bubbles made with a specially devised mixture — while Ronnie Carteret and Timmie blew with her. There she sat, in her blue serge dress and unbecoming school hat, horribly young and horribly pretty,

and read the reviews and repeated, 'Not at all bad, Daddy; this fellow is properly impressed,' with an assurance that was impertinent after her own verdict. Then, murmuring that she had her work to do, she rose, swinging her satchel, lightly humming, and left the room. It was not at all like her to abandon her father in his need. Cosima was surprised and even taken aback to see her go; and a dark, chill silence followed her departure. With a dull throb of realisation she felt herself awake and look about her, as if remembering unbecoming things that she had done in a drugged sleep. Aldous had taken up the paper and she raised her book and tried to read.

Here they sat, alone together — as so seldom now — in her beautiful room; which had been, she knew, like fairyland to him when first he had entered it. She remembered his first entering it, four years ago, with that odd unfocussed gaze of his. It had been not long after their first meeting at Rest Harrow and he was still strange to her and a little frightening. And she remembered the last time he had come, before their union, after that dreadful separation when her heart had sunken with fear as never before in all her life. She had thought when he entered then and took her in his arms, that life could not lift her higher. Yet it had.

Her head bent low over her book, her hand unconsciously toying with Monty's ears, she recalled the scene that had transfigured her life. They had sat together, his hard, unloverlike grasp laid on her wrist. Unloverlike; that, from the beginning, had been his deepest charm. When he held her in his arms, it was the life she had known so well; the life of passion at its best; but when he had only held her wrist and said, 'You must be my wife,' when she had felt constrained by a new compulsion to tell him what might wreck her in his eyes, and had known herself more loved because of past misfortune, the new loveliness had stolen over her and she had worshipped him, its revealer. And they sat here now, dark, cold, alienated, and with a feeling of nausea she saw her own perfidy.

Suddenly she heard him address her. 'I'm so awfully sorry, Cosima.'

She put down her book and looked over at him. He had been looking at her, for some time, perhaps, had perhaps been studying the signs of tumult and havoc on her face. His voice was weary but gentle. And perhaps he had been remembering. 'Sorry for what, Aldous?' she asked, hesitating; for he spoke with neither accusation nor love; he spoke like a sad old friend, and she remembered having heard that

old married people in almshouses chose rather to be separated, often, than together. One could be good friends separated.

'That I've been slated like this. It's rather a sour business for a wife: I realise that.'

'Oh, Aldous! — Oh, darling!' She gazed at him, touched to the quick, and the memory of past loveliness assailed her flagging heart and all her face softened to its childlike sweetness.

He smiled at her, though he did not come to her, and wagging his foot he said: 'You've made a very bad bargain, Cosima, my dear.'

'Oh, Aldous! Don't!' Her gaze knelt before him. 'You know that I adore you. — Even when I'm most horrible,' she said.

It seemed to be with a deep and sudden wistfulness that his eyes now rested on her, revealing abysses of doubt and sadness. 'Do you?' he said.

'You know it, Aldous.'

He said nothing for a little while and in his silence she heard within herself an echo of the abyss. This kindly silence was the best they had to hope for, then. Never again would he come with the Perseus ardour to rescue and enrapture her. Was it all her fault? Had she not been true? Was it not rather that too much had been laid upon her and that un-

der the burden of his past life her strength had broken? — Philippa. — Oh, horrible Philippa, fixing that gaze upon her from far away.

'Perhaps the new book will be better,' Aldous said presently, and, though he was so weary, though they were both so sad, something in their interchange had quickened him; it was with a venturing trust that he looked at her.

'Darling — of course it will. — Not that this one isn't good. — Only you've not quite forged your weapons yet; perhaps that's it. — You need a sword, not a pebble from the brook, to face the modern Goliath with.'

'Pretty, Cosima, awfully pretty,' he smiled at her. He had always loved her bright turns of fancy and her heart blossomed, winning commendation. He must be the one to commend; not she. All she asked of him was to be above her, in everything. 'That's just it,' he said. 'I've trusted too much in pebbles from my brook and must find an anvil and forge a sword. I shan't be silenced yet,' he said, and his gaze unfixed itself, and drifted from her.

Oh, how sad! But how beautiful. He trusted her — not understanding — or else forgiving — her perfidy. 'Begin at once, darling,' she urged. 'Your mind is teeming, I know.'

He stretched and raised his arms and locked them behind his head, his wide unfocussed gaze communing with itself. 'I'm eager to begin. — That's why they can't dishearten me. — I've still so much to say! — What about River House next week, Cosima? Now that the holidays are beginning?'

'Why not London, Aldous darling? You have your quiet study here and all, all your time. You know how seldom you consent to attend on your frivolous wife.'

'I know. You make it all delightfully easy for me. But it's not the country quiet. And I'm so fond of the place. I feel, if I could write a book there, that my old grandmother would bless it. I feel thought permeating me when I enter. It's a house that's been studied in.'

'Lovely, darling. — I see her so like you, that grandmother, reading her philosophers. She's become real to me since we've gone there. — But wait till Easter Week, Aldous, when Father is coming. I'm so packed with engagements for this next fortnight.'

'I know you are. And I wouldn't ask you to give them up. Philippa and I could be alone there till you and your father join us.'

She was arrested; cruelly arrested. But she put

command upon herself, took counsel with herself, having perforce learned something of both since Philippa had come into their lives, and she said very mildly — for it was because of the new trust that he could put the child forward so innocently: 'If you *can't* wait, darling — and I don't want you to go without me — why not Rest Harrow? I do love River House, dearly, for your sake; but Rest Harrow has deeper roots for me; I saw you there first; and the country there is full of you. It's ages since we went, and until Easter Week — when we could all be together at River House — Beth, I'm sure, will love to have Philippa.'

Now it was he who was arrested, and though she had spoken with a mildness deceptive to herself, she was aware, while she waited for his answer, that her heart began again its dreadful thumping. He was arrested; but he was not yet cautious. 'Beth had her for Christmas,' he said.

'Only for a week, Aldous. You can't call that having her — and you took her off to Switzerland for a fortnight. It was the first time she'd really stayed with her mother since leaving her, and Beth, I'm sure, expected that when she was in London, at school here, she would divide her time evenly between you. I do think Beth must feel it. I do think

she ought to give her mother the Easter holidays.'

'Do you mean the full month? — She's specially looking forward to the time at River House with me,' said Aldous, after a moment, looking not at her, but at the fire and his gaze was now fully focussed. He no longer communed with himself. The world once more was with him.

'Oh — you've talked it over? — But I just said, darling, that we should all be together for Easter Week.'

'We'd thought of some little walking tours — down to Christchurch and Romsey — for Philippa's architecture.'

'Oh. I thought it was to write the new book you wanted to go. — How do you propose to stay at River House with no servants? — You've always had my servants till now to care for you.' She saw his face stiffening, but under the blow she had received her control was slipping from her. They had planned it all. She had had no place in their plans. All he craved for was to be alone with Philippa — and away from her.

'Old Mrs. Mickleham would do for us perfectly,' he said. 'And the book would, of course, take most of my time.'

A little silence fell. 'Do you remember,' said

Cosima — she steadied her voice, fixing hard eyes on the memory — 'how a year ago, here in my room upstairs, when you were so unhappy about your separation from Philippa — you said that if she came to live with us, you would not pine for her or think of her so much? — Do you remember your gratitude to me when I planned everything — everything — even pretending that it was to my advantage so that it should be sweeter to you — so that you should be contented and happy?' — Tears had sprung to her eyes imagining that past magnanimity. — 'Have you forgotten everything? — Everything that I have done and suffered for you?' Her voice broke — she put her hands before her eyes.

Alas! Her helpless folly! Before the menace of her tears all his trust had hardened to bitter caution. 'I have forgotten nothing. What I said was true. I don't think of her so much. I don't pine. But it's natural that a father should like his child to spend her holidays with him.'

'It's natural, perhaps, that a mother should hope to see her daughter once or twice a year. — I can't understand it. It astonishes me. I feel it discreditable that a child should show such wounding preference.'

'Discreditable? To whom? To me or Philippa?'

'To both of you — since you force it from me.'

'You're an odd advocate for Beth,' said Aldous, eyeing her with his dagger gaze — she dropped her hands to receive it. 'You are not thinking of Beth or caring for her feelings in the least — just as you weren't caring for mine, just now, over the reviews; — you are only trying to wound. Well, you succeed; but it doesn't do you or me any good that I can see.'

She sat still, her hands fallen to her lap, her eyes proudly averted. Monty beside her, aware of distress, got on his hind legs, put his paws on her shoulder, and reached out an anxious head to lick her cheek — but she put him away. 'I see,' she said. 'Very well. Yes. — Do go to River House with her. As you had planned. — Do. I won't trouble you there. Father will take me in.' She rose, and Monty jumped down, still looking up at her, begging for recognition.

'Don't be absurd, Cosima. I knew that you would not care to leave London till Easter. You said yourself that you were full up with engagements. Nothing was kept from you. — You and your father will come for Easter Week as we arranged.'

'Thank you. Thank you very much for your hospitality. You are kind.' She was moving to the door and paused to pick up Monty, bending her cheek against his head while desperate thoughts passed through her heart, desperate but true thoughts. — 'It is the end. — Tell him now that it is the end. — It may kill you to say it — but it will be better to be brave. — He does not love you and you have no place in his life if there is no love.'

'Cosima — I do beg of you ——' he muttered, still sitting in his chair, his eyes still on the fire. — 'What have I said or done?' It was icily, not tenderly, he spoke, and finding the half-truth with which to hide the true words that choked her heart with fear, she muttered, leaving him: 'It's always the same! — Always! — Whatever I try to do for you! — You put her first! — You put her before me in everything!' —

CHAPTER XI

'HE'LL actually be here next week,' said Philippa to herself. She sat on the edge of her bed and read the letter she had found on the hall table on coming in from school. She had seen in a moment from whom it must be, with foreign postmark, addressed to her at Mummie's and forwarded in Mummie's handwriting; and all through the little scene over the reviews she had been aware of a warm glow of secrecy and conjecture. Daddy was very unobservant and would never, anyway, pause to look at her letters, and for nothing in the world would she have alluded to her friend of Nollekyns Park before Cosima. She had not said to herself that she would never forgive Cosima for her behaviour on that occasion. Under all the suavities of their intercourse she knew that she had really forgiven Cosima nothing; nothing at all, from the very beginning. She had only to think of a black-and-silver hat tilting towards Daddy in the circle of the opera-glasses to feel, rising within her, the old unappeasable fierceness; but since the episode of River House, when Cosima had put pressure on Daddy

and he on her, Philippa knew very well that everything was altered between them, and to Cosima's disadvantage. Since then they had been more definitely wary in dealing with each other and under the little scene just enacted over the tea-table there had flowed a deep river of antagonism. 'She doesn't mind how much she hurts him so long as she thinks she's hurting me through him,' she had thought, calmly, to herself, reclining on Daddy's chair and keeping shining eyes on Cosima. 'She'd give anything in the world to get rid of me now. She'd be *too* thankful if I were knocked down by a motor and killed; — though perhaps for a little while, when I first came, she really rather liked it, showing off to Daddy how marvellously unselfish she could be, and showing off to me how he adored her for it!' But though on any other occasion she would have revelled in the opportunity given her for displaying and checkmating Cosima's malice, she had had very little attention to spare for poor Daddy's discomfiture. — She was longing too much to read Chal's letter and had only paused to plant a dart or two before escaping with her hidden trophy. 'Daddy must just take care of himself for once,' she thought, skipping up the stairs, all elated surmise, and now, pulling off her hat at last, stripping off her jacket,

she read the letter over again, smiling gravely in her complete contentment and savouring its every implication.

'Dear Philippa' — the prettily engraved address at the top of the paper was New York — how far away! — 'I've been working hard towards my cathedral ever since I saw you and am having a year's travel in the middle of my course at Columbia. — Columbia isn't an American town; it's a university in New York where one studies architecture and other things. My mother and Alison are crossing with me, but they are going straight to France, while I shall be in London for a week towards the end of March — arriving, I expect, on the 20th, and it would be awfully nice if you happened to be with your mother and I could see you. Might I take you both to a play? And will you perhaps have a walk with me under those big trees where I first saw you? I'm having a book sent to you from Bain's that I think you'll like. It describes a part of America as different from New England as anything can be, and the building of a modern cathedral. I care for it more than for any book I've read for ever so long. You'll tell me how you like it if we meet. Yours ever CHAL DAY'

How odd it was, his being an American, thought

Philippa — gazing with a contented smile at the letter and noting each peculiarity of the delicately formed handwriting — when one liked him so much: not that one didn't like Americans, but that it didn't do one much good to like them, since they were, in the nature of things, so removed. She liked Chal more than any young man she had ever met; more than Dobbie Harding, Jennifer's brother, who was certainly a great dear and awfully fond of her; or Ronnie Carteret — clever creature — he was cleverer than Chal, no doubt; or Roger Wedderburn; Roger was more than a dear; he was becoming a problem; and it was unfair that at seventeen one should be presented with problems, for she wanted not even to think about getting married for years and years and years. And there were all Cosima's men, old and young, some of them exceedingly gratifying to youthful vanity. But Chal was different from them all, as if his aura was quite a different colour: Dobbie was scarlet and Ronnie Oxford blue, and Roger, poor lamb, a painful pink; — but Chal was the only young man she had ever met who was just the colour of a high, a soft spring sky, intensest, clearest blue; and it was certainly a pity to feel this of anyone who could count for nothing but a book and a walk under the trees. — Never mind; he

should count for those to the full — and what a surprise for poor darling little Mummie — Philippa sprang up and went to the telephone — to hear that she was to have her for a whole week of the holidays. 'A whole week will be the safest way of missing nothing of him,' thought Philippa, ringing up Kensington Square; and as it turned out, it was really far better that Cosima had refused to receive him. — It put her out, not Chal, if only she'd had the wits to foresee it; and it was far more orderly, she thought — waiting for her answer — that a girl in her difficult position should receive charming American friends under her mother's rather than her stepmother's roof. Philippa had a great feeling for order. 'Yes, Barton; it's I, Miss Philippa,' she said. 'Is Mummie in? I want to speak to her. — Mrs. Day will like it far better, too,' she thought, though very indifferent to Mrs. Day. — 'A year of travel! How marvellous!' — How she wished she and Daddy could have a year of travel free of Cosima who was always having headaches, and how could they be free of Cosima when it was she who had the money, — hateful, humiliating thought, clouding her suddenly with an old distaste, not only for her lovely little room, but for herself. Had it been only because of Daddy, because she knew he

longed for her so, that she had, little by little, felt herself sinking permanently into Hyde Park Square? Had not all the things that money brought counted? including Cosima's amusing world; — not the world she would choose to stay in; not Jennifer's, not Chal's world; — but a delightful world to skirmish and play about in. — 'Yes, Mummie darling — it's I. — Philippa.' — How strange it still was to hear Mummie's voice emerge among the French prints and *toile de Jouy*. 'Can I come to you next week?'

'Come to me, darling! How lovely, Phil! Why, of course! When? To spend a night?' Poor wistful Mummie; the hope in her voice controlled by experience.

'Rather not! For the whole week — from the 20th. — Can you bear with me?'

'*Bear* with you!' Mummie's voice was like Aaron's rod, at a touch it blossomed into gladness. 'Do you really mean it?'

Philippa felt a little prick of shame, a little pang of contrition hearing that gladness. — It was dreadful to be a mother and love so humbly someone who really only cared enough to be sorry — and to use you. — How odious she was! She would never have dreamed of spending another whole dull week in Kensington with Mummie and Billy — Grannie's

vengeful figure hovering in and out — if Chal hadn't been coming; but Mummie should have her gladness undimmed by *that* knowledge! 'I should rather say I *did* mean it!' she returned, and asked tenderly: 'How are you, darling? Still pursued by the committees with horn and hound?' She heard that Mummie was still smiling as she answered: 'I'm keeping my nostrils above water.'

Heavens! — What a horrible simile! It came over Philippa how horrible it was as she hung up the receiver, for in hearing it she had only felt that Mummie had sometimes a very delicious way of tossing back a metaphor. She had supplied her with this one and she had been thinking of committees, and so had Mummie; but the picture of the wretched stag, swimming under water, made her feel sick for a moment.

Cosima that night dined out and Philippa and her father were alone. She had noticed that he was less and less asked to dine out with Cosima. If, in the time of their first establishment in London, he had roused surmise and interest, he more and more, Philippa suspected, ceased to do so. The book would do him no good, either, in that highly sophisticated yet nervously subservient *milieu* where even young Philippa was aware that to ad-

mire the wrong thing was the one acknowledged immorality. Daddy, with his proud independence of mind and underivative pungency of perception, was cleverer, of course, than all of them put together — Philippa said it to herself with emphasis; but he was unmalleable, ungracious, inappropriately caustic — more and more, perhaps, taking after the old Scottish grandmother who read Hegel in cap and shawl. If he was not sophisticated, it was only because he did not care to be — so Philippa still assured herself — having far other fish to fry; only when the fish turned out not to be quite so large as one expected, it made one's indifference less picturesque. Philippa, as she sat down with him to dinner, was aware of a scorched quality in him, and remembered with a dart of self-reproach that she had probably exposed him to further brands from Cosima's fire. Never mind: she would soothe him, lay cool soft coverings over the flayed surfaces. She dedicated the evening to making him happy, the more emphatically since Cosima had made him so very unhappy; the more emphatically, too, because she did not intend to say anything about Chal and his letter. She felt a little shy with Daddy about Chal. Not only would he wince at any reminder of the sorry affair at River House, but she had not for-

gotten the pathetic frailty displayed when he had shrunk from her avowal of special fondness for the new friend. It had really been a little as if he had been jealous of Chal; and she would give him no further occasion for such disquiets. Thank goodness, Mummie was there and everything was in perfect order.

'Philippa,' he said halfway through dinner, after they had talked of Rima, and Epstein, and 'Green Mansions,' which she had been reading — 'I'm planning to take you down to River House next week. Cosima can't join us till Easter; but you and I can camp out happily with Mrs. Mickleham, can't we, till she comes, and have our walks to Christchurch and Romsey.'

Philippa felt herself taken aback; checked and taken aback. She almost felt herself flush. 'Lovely, Daddy!' she exclaimed, smiling at him and remembering, as if in self-defence, that she had put on his favourite pale blue dress and might have chosen to go to the play with Ruth and Roger Wedderburn. 'Rain or shine we'll see Christchurch and Romsey — and I love walking in the rain; — only I'll come one week later; — that will give us heaps of time; — because I'm booked to Mummie for next week.'

'Booked to your mother?' He really stared at her. She remembered from far away that Daddy could be sometimes a little foolish. — Why should he stare like that? 'When was that arranged?' he asked.

'This afternoon. We had a talk over the telephone. I think I owe her a week now; don't you, Daddy?'

'But I thought she realised that you and I had planned the Easter holidays at River House. — I'm sure it was taken for granted. — I should have thought you could have made her see that it's a rather special time for us — in the country.'

'But it wasn't Mummie who suggested it, Daddy,' said Philippa, and though her voice was as mild as milk a certain steeliness came into it. 'It was I. She'd never suggest anything, poor lamb, or think of her own claims, ever. Even in London it's rather a special time, and, you know,' — Philippa looked into his eyes — 'when fathers and mothers are divorced, the children usually give most time to the one whose fault it isn't.'

Her father's look met hers, but the odd, the wandering eye, drifted a little aside, while his narrow flush (Daddy never got red in the face) stole up to his cheek. She was dreadfully sorry for him,

but he had brought it on himself and she kept her advantage, looking back at the eye that still met hers, unwaveringly.

'I thought you preferred being with me. Your mother has been so perfectly generous — you needn't remind me how generous she's been — that I thought it was a choice you felt free to make,' he said, marshalling his startled faculties.

'But so it is, Daddy darling; it *is* a choice: I do prefer, of course, being with you, and I *am* with you, aren't I? — It's just because of that, that I oughtn't to leave Mummie *quite* out. You did, just now, I think, need reminding.'

Her father said nothing for a moment. The butler had left the room and he got up and went to the side table and brought back the salad bowl and helped himself again, not noticing that his salad plate was supplied. He had had a dreadful shock, of course; and he didn't know what he was doing: but Philippa, though sorry, felt no weakening. He had brought it on himself by his ingratitude — it was no less — towards Mummie. He had almost ventured to accuse her of greed when he alone was the greedy one.

'You're quite right, Phil,' he said after a moment, and as she heard him she felt fond of him

again; 'and I deserve it. It was only that I'd counted on you; I'd made rather special arrangements; we're so seldom alone together. — But you're quite right, dear.' And he added, the flush on his cheek deepening as he suddenly realised the significance of the words just spoken and how they put Cosima out — 'Cosima will be very glad. — I mean, about your mother. She was saying, only this afternoon, that she was afraid your mother would be feeling hurt.'

'Oh. Was she?' Philippa's tone, cool, cautious, correct, conveyed a host of unspoken comments, and that her father felt them she saw as he went on, mistakenly, helplessly elaborating, while he ate his salad rapidly: 'I think she felt I'd been rather to blame, felt I'd been rather inconsiderate — just as you do Phil; — clutching at you so selfishly.'

It was on the tip of Philippa's tongue to say, 'How awfully kind of Cosima to be thinking about Mummie's rights!' but she checked the impulse. She had long since learned how far more efficacious such comments were if left unspoken, for Daddy knew perfectly well that she must think them. He must be aware, as he ate his salad unseeingly, that he had revealed to her a contest between him and Cosima and that Cosima already resented their

River House plan. She did not need to expose Cosima to him, and he would be grateful to her for the silence with which she covered his own involuntary betrayal.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER New England, you ought to see New Mexico,' said Chal. 'It's perhaps rather absurd to talk to you about New Mexico when you haven't seen Chartres yet; — but I have the feeling that Chartres is part of you; that you'll always have it there, just round your corner; whereas New Mexico would be an adventure.'

It disconcerted Philippa a little — though in her deep contentment she was hardly aware of it — that Chal should take her remoteness as much for granted as she took his. They walked together under the trees in the lovely Easter weather, and he seemed so near that it was difficult to realise that he was to be so far away, that this was the last of his days in London, and that she would probably not see him again for ever and ever so long. When he spoke of coming back he spoke vaguely; as if uncertain of all that might intervene. Here they walked, down her and Daddy's special grove, where every tree as they passed beneath it seemed to smile old memories upon her; on the right, over the thickets of the Flower Walk, the topmost branches

of the double-cherry were visible, hardly yet in bud, and in the distance the almond-trees spread clouds of fragile pink against the sky. So many memories were in it all that Philippa, walking there in her youth, could imagine what it would be like to be old. The sweetness was poignant with the past, and, in that sweet embalming poignancy, Daddy's face seemed as far away as Christopher's; and both of them might have died fifty years ago.

'What I loved was about the air, Chal — that the Archbishop longed for when he was back in Auvergne; that light dry air — do you remember? — that one could breathe only "on the bright edges of the world." — And Contento and Angelica. — How glad I am they weren't separated!'

'And the chapter about the Archbishop and old Sada in the cathedral at night,' said Chal. — Their talk was of the book and of a past more remote than her memories, yet it seemed to embroider the present in shining stitches upon that far-away background. — 'When he puts his cloak around her; — didn't you love that? And his giving her the little silver medal of the Virgin: an image; "the physical form of love." — The heart of Catholicism is in that. I'm more a Quaker than a Catholic — but I love the heart of Catholicism.'

'You a Quaker, Chal!'

'A Quaker who wants to build cathedrals! Perhaps not quite; but, though Mummie is very High Church, my father *was* a Quaker; I used to go to Meeting with him; and his people have been Friends for generations. — Do you remember about old Sada?'

'Yes; but not so well. I loved it all, though; simply loved it. And it makes me long to go to New Mexico. I don't suppose it's very much spoiled there, is it? — Not as much as all the rest of the world. Willa Cather hates standardisation, and so do I. It's creeping over everything, isn't it, and it *is* your fault in America, don't you think? I mean; — you started it.' Philippa was feeling at once very young and very grown up. Chal gave her that feeling; she was a mere girl, for whom he would make any allowance, whom he would stand by whatever she did; yet almost a woman whom he treated like an equal; — though Chal treated everybody like an equal. He talked to Billy just as he talked to her.

'Well, with us it's been a necessity; it's grown up out of our necessities; — people are always blaming each other for things they can't help. — We are trying out, over there, perhaps the biggest experi-

ment the world's ever seen. England conquering Europe — in quite a new sense — on the American continent.'

'We? Who do you mean by we?'

'Well, the people like you and me; — with high tops to their heads and eyes you can see into.' He smiled down into hers. The tops of their heads, the black and the gold, were bare, for the sun was so warm that they carried their hats in their hands.

'You believe in all that Nordic stunt?'

'Why, of course. Though that's only to say that I like people like us better because I understand them better. — But that's what makes civilisations; — the people who understand each other getting together to do what they like best.'

'But it sounds like the Germans, Chal. It sounds like Mussolini.' Chal was very Nordic with the clear grey eyes and the lift to the bridge of his nose.

'No; because what we like best is liberty — for ourselves and for other people; and we have a sort of gift for showing other people how to take care of themselves; — which is what most people haven't an idea of how to do; — their first idea is usually to cut the other fellow's head off. — Sometimes I think — about standardisation — that it's a kindergarten of freedom. I mean, with all the medley of

races we've got to deal with over there, it's perhaps the only way of getting them into some sort of unity; not the image of love' — Chal smiled to himself as the metaphor came to him — 'but the image — a very ugly one I know — of order. By the time they've learned to use toothbrushes and take baths and drive a car, they've begun to feel like Americans; and that's the only thing one can do with them, for a start: — get them, somehow, to feel they all belong together.'

'You seem to be defending ugliness, Chal. Isn't it frightfully dangerous? Won't it eat all the beauty out of the world — unless it's stopped in time?'

'It can't be stopped. Nothing that grows out of a necessity can be stopped. It can only grow into something else. — I'm not defending it; I'm only accepting it. — It can only be changed by the people who want it to change but who accept it. — Just as you said about fashions; do you remember?'

'Fashions?'

'Yes. You said they could only be changed by the people who stayed inside them. — I found that very illuminating.'

'But how *can* we change the factories and the

petrol-pumps and the hideous towns — once they're there?'

'By wanting beautiful ones. — Why shouldn't factories and towns be beautiful? — Just as our skyscrapers are beginning to be? — The real trouble about America, you know — about my America — is that so many of us feel they just can't bear it and run away to Europe to hide from it. That's our greatest danger.'

'Well — I agree with you there. I wouldn't turn my back on it and leave it to the people who'd just learned to use a toothbrush!'

'Of course you wouldn't!' he smiled at her. 'You'd stay and help to build beautiful factories. It's people like you who've made England; by sticking to things that were going dangerously — even when they were most afraid. You have to fight ugliness here in England, too, you know, Philippa.'

They had walked on towards Hyde Park, and in the limpid stillness of the spring evening — all the children had gone home and hardly a dog barked — Philippa suddenly felt herself listening to the silence that was full of the present. It seemed to encircle them like a softly shining sphere. It was all serenity yet all waiting. Usually waiting made

one anxious or impatient; but she felt that she could walk on for ever with Chal, like this, contented to listen and to wait. But when he spoke again his words were of a texture so different from her assurance that once more she was disconcerted. 'I think your mother is one of the dearest people I've ever met, Philippa.' He had been meditating it, she felt at once: he has been thinking how best to say something about Mummie.

'*Isn't* she? — I'm so glad. — She likes you most awfully; they all do,' she said.

'Do they? Well, I'm glad — though your grandmother rather scares me. — Anyone your mother *didn't* like would hardly be worth worrying over. — She's so lovely looking,' said Chal. 'She has such lovely eyes. I never saw just that colour.'

'They're hazel, aren't they? Golden hazel. The same colour as Billy's.'

'Not quite. More the colour of a golden sky, an October sky at sunset. — What she makes me think of is a Paschal lamb.'

'A Paschal lamb?'

'Yes; offered up, somehow.'

'Oh, Chal. — Don't. — What *can* I do!'

'Why' — he looked round at her quickly — 'what you're doing now. — *You're* all right. —

Giving her her share. Staying with her and being sweet to her. It makes her so happy. — One sees it shining out of her — how happy you've made her.'

Philippa felt herself flushing and the silence was all broken into a medley of clashing memories. 'But — it can't be the same, Chal. — I mean, her share can't be the same as his. — Because I love him so much the best.' They had come to the road that divides Kensington Gardens from Hyde Park and stood there looking unseeingly at the traffic.

'The more you do for people the more you love them, I think,' said Chal. 'Perhaps, in time, her share *will* be the same' — and as she heard him Philippa felt suddenly that his gentleness might be more alarming than other people's severity; the more he cared for you the more alarming he might become; and it was disconcerting, deeply so, to find him thinking almost as much of Mummie as of her.

'No: — no — of course I love her,' she said, but there was now a slight hardness in her voice; 'only — I can't help it, Chal, and I'm sorry if it makes you feel me horrid — I love Daddy so much, much more that it's like not loving her in comparison. — I don't *like* her eyes in comparison to his; they

almost irritate me sometimes when they stare in that gentle, shining way — hoping to see something that's not there. 'It's always been so' — with a sort of doggedness under his attentive gaze she went on: 'Can one help these things? It's almost as if I didn't belong to her at all in comparison to him; so that when she loves me so much, when she takes it so for granted that she has a *right* to love me so much — it almost makes me embarrassed; it almost makes me feel as if I didn't love her at all sometimes.'

They had turned back to the glades, stepped over the low railings, and were walking now, quickly, over the grass while he listened, still with his gentleness, but, she knew, with distress. And suddenly that hidden discomfiture flooded her heart and she felt that he saw her as a child, only as a dear child, who had drifted away from its true harbour, and she said quickly, her head bent low: 'Why, Chal, I shouldn't have come to her at all, this time — if it hadn't been for you!'

He said nothing to this; nothing at all for a few moments; and when she heard his voice again, it was as if they were more really equal than ever before; for there was shyness in it. 'That is darling of you. — I'm most awfully grateful, for I did so

much want to see you. — But I do wish it had been for her, too.'

She could summon in her discomfiture none of the resources of her hurt womanhood, she could only stumble on, the helplessly truthful child. — 'But it wasn't. I was going to the country with Daddy. He's down there now, at River House; quite alone; because of this. — You see: — I knew I couldn't see you at all unless I came to Mummie; and that's why I came. — I'm very sorry.' Defiance had crept into her voice; and tears.

'But Philippa — dear little Philippa ——'

'I'm not little! I'm seventeen. I'm almost as old as you are!' And now, in the pause that followed this assertion, she felt that she had revealed childishness only, and so helped him to master his discomposure. He was dreadfully older than she was — simply dreadfully, when he spoke again, saying, ever so affectionately and with just the right infusion of lightness for carrying a child over its flurry of temper: 'But at our age six or seven years makes such a difference; — it's absurd that it should, and in a year or two we'll be perfectly even; but just now I feel as if I had a right to treat you like your elder brother, and care for you, and advise you — in a way you might object to if you were a

little older. — You know what good friends we are — or if you don't, I do' — he bent his head and perforce she had to glance round at him, though the dreadful tears were there for him to see — 'and it would have been terribly unkind if you hadn't been willing to rob your father a little for my sake. — You mustn't misunderstand me, Philippa dear. — I'm not forgetting my good fortune in remembering your mother's dearth.'

Perhaps he was not quite so composed as he succeeded in seeming, for he hesitated a good deal before his words and only brought out 'dearth' after an appreciable pause, and Philippa murmured in a low voice: 'It was I who told you we'd taken everything from her.'

'Of course it was,' said Chal. 'And I seem to understand how you all feel. — You know, from that moment by the brook when you said it was dreadful to have divorced parents and put your hands before your face, I seemed to understand you all. I'd seen him, and I'd seen her — your stepmother; and when you said that you interested me most awfully. I knew that things were too hard for you.'

'I interested you before that,' said Philippa. 'You didn't like me because you were sorry for me!'

And at this something happened in Chal that irradiated the perplexing imbroglio where they stumbled. She felt her heart lift again — despite herself — as she heard him burst out laughing; for she delighted him, charmed and delighted him, and she knew it. She did not care how far his laughter put her back into childhood so long as she was secure of charming him, nor how much he talked of Mummie so long as she was sure that it was of her rather than of Mummie he was really thinking; and she laughed, too, turning her proud fair jocund face upon him, her eyes tilting up at the corners with an odd touch of wildness, the dimple in her cheek mocking any attempt upon her security. What difference did it make whether he regarded her as child or as woman, when she saw so clearly that he thought her bewitching?

CHAPTER XIII

'THEY seem very merry,' said Mr. Chantry as he and his daughter drove up to River House and heard the sound of song and laughter within. The front door stood open to the sunny day, the drawing-room door was open, and as Cosima wearily ascended the steps she saw, beyond the globe, that the drawing-room window, too, was open, so that the whole house seemed involved in a picnicking informality in which she could have no part. In the hall, where she paused and looked about her, Philippa's tweed coat was cast down on one chair and a muddy pair of Aldous's walking-shoes under another. Two glasses recently emptied of milk had been set down on the table, and over the balusters hung a damp face towel. They had come more quickly than they expected, and the servants, just arrived by train, had not yet been able to cope with the insufficiencies of Mrs. Mickleham's *régime*. 'I do pray they thought to light a fire in your room, darling,' she said to her father, and, with a certain dryness, he answered: 'I pray so, too, for the air is icy.'

Philippa was sitting at the piano, a sweater thrown open at her neck, stumbling blithely over the accompaniment to 'Who is Sylvia?' and singing in her high clear voice. Cosima's brow contracted even before she entered, for it fretted her to hear a familiar air assaulted, and fretfulness was a refuge. Under her acrid mood lurked a stagnant misery. Aldous, lying at full length on the sofa, his hands behind his head, a pipe between his teeth, was all acquiescent admiration, and a pang went through her seeing his contentment. Since their scene in London they had not said a word — not one — recalling or softening its implications.

'Here *is* Sylvia!' cried Philippa — dashing off a welcoming arpeggio and springing to her feet, and Aldous jumped up to kiss her and said: 'Why, Cosima — we didn't expect you for an hour yet! I didn't hear you arrive' — and Mr. Chantry doffed his broad-brimmed hat and bent his lips towards Philippa's cheek. She evaded his salute, Cosima from the corner of her eye observed, with an offensive competence, sliding past his arms to pick up Montague who bounded and barked among them.

Aldous and his child had been having, for their week together, a heavenly time. It beamed from

their bright eyes and country cheeks. She had never seen Aldous look so young. He and Philippa had been walking to Christchurch and Romsey and drinking milk and singing, and now they were able to pretend that they were glad to see her. He was happy because she had not been there, and their acted gladness banded them together against them.

'Brr — it's cold in here, my children,' said her father, walking, still in his fur coat, to the fire.

'We've been living out-of-doors so much that we've become fresh-air fiends,' said Philippa, running to shut the window. — 'Oh — I do hope Mrs. Mickleham has remembered to make a fire in your room, Cosima, — I must go and see.'

'Oh. — Please. — Please,' said Cosima, sinking down, her cloak about her, before the fire, and feeling suddenly that she would like to cry. 'It ought to have been lighted the first thing this morning. — Father's, too. — We are anything but fresh-air fiends. — Will you be so very kind, Philippa.'

Philippa paused to listen, to assent, and skimmed away, and Cosima, looking round the room to where, at the other end, the reflection of her own cowering white figure met her eyes, said: 'I do hope you've been enjoying yourselves.'

'Immensely,' said Aldous. He leaned back against the mantelpiece and knocked out his pipe. 'It's wonderful what we've crowded into one week.'

'And the new book has been getting on?'

'I worked hard for my solitary time. — Broke ground, I think. — But since Philippa came I've been less industrious.' He was braving it out; determined on loyalty to his happiness, refusing to let the shadow of their altercation limit its expression.

'Well — you've been teaching her Schubert as well as architecture, I see,' said Cosima, smiling wryly over that horrible sense of tears, and Mr. Chantry strolled to the piano and sat down and ran his thick fingers fluently over the keys, humming 'Who is Sylvia?' in a fruity voice; and as Philippa's singing had irritated her, so Cosima knew that her father's singing irritated Aldous; — but, at all events — though the plum was ripe to bursting — Daddy did know how to play and sing. 'They'll both be warm by the time you go up' — Philippa had returned, and bent to Cosima to whisper: 'I've lighted the fires myself — and piled on the coal. — Mrs. Mickleham *has* had hot bottles in the beds all day.'

'I did think she might have been trusted to have warm rooms for us,' said Cosima, and Philippa, unperturbed, replied: 'Tea will warm you beautifully and it's all my fault. — I ought to have told her. — Well, how is my Monty boy?' she still whispered, raising him in her arms and sinking on the sofa to receive his endearments while Mr. Chantry passed to the 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus.' — 'Oh — I do love that one!' She held Monty aside to listen.

The child had changed since Cosima had last seen her, only a fortnight before. Even then it had been absurd to call her child; but now one of those transformations that take place in the young, making them suddenly strange to eyes that see them freshly, showed her as what she was to remain until age came to wither or distort her meaning. Anything can happen to the face of seventeen years old, unexpected heredities sweeping away in one fell season the sweet uncertainties of youth. But for Philippa the mists of dawn had lifted to reveal happiest fulfilment. She was beautiful; simply beautiful; and she knew it. Her security breathed from her like the fragrance from a flower, a challenge, a menace to rival loveliness. 'She looks as if she'd been made love to already,' thought

Cosima, sitting by the fire, head bent, and glancing over at Philippa from under her brows. 'And when a woman looks like that every man wants to make love to her. — Only see silly old father, preening himself already and trying to catch an approving glance. — How ludicrous, how pitiful it is! — What does it all amount to — when it's nothing in our real selves at all?' And deep in her brooding, hungry heart the answer was given: 'Everything for you — poor creature.'

Philippa still quieted Montague to listen: — 'It goes like that. — I couldn't play it,' she said, when the last 'ewigkeit' had sounded. Mr. Chantry sang more like a disappointed lover than a lost soul, but Philippa now was thinking of the song and not of the singer, and she got up, holding Monty on her arm, and went to stand behind him and look over his shoulder at the music. 'Oh — play the end again, will you?' and, as he obeyed her: 'How terrible, Daddy,' she muttered. — 'Isn't it terrible?'

'Beautiful,' said her father. He leaned against the mantelpiece, his eyes on hers, understanding, reassuring, for the song frightened her.

'But that makes it wrong.'

'How wrong?'

'I mean — if they are so beautiful as that — all

afraid — all holding together — it wouldn't be hell. It makes it almost a kind of heaven.'

'Yes; it does, darling: beauty does redeem hell.' He smiled at his child, Cosima and Mr. Chantry quite forgotten, and she saw the look of unutterable love that passed between them. Mr. Chantry, too, was smiling at Philippa, his bright dark eye drifting up and down her flower-like surfaces, her birch-tree lines, and said, taking the credit to himself: 'Not a song for you to try or trouble over, my fair young dryad. Dryads have no souls to lose, fortunately. They belong to a happy mythology.' Mrs. Mickleham was bringing in tea, and he rose from the piano laying a casual hand on Philippa's shoulder, at which she drew away. — 'Ah, tea, tea; — tea after eternity does greatly please! — And do my eyes divine hot buttered toast in that covered dish?'

'Hot buttered toast! I told you it would warm you up! — Will you pour out, Cosima?' said Philippa, for Mrs. Mickleham had placed table and tray before the younger hostess.

'No, no — you by all means; — since we are living in your mythology. — Is my fire going yet, Mrs. Mickleham? Is my room getting at all warm?'

'I think so, ma'am. Miss Pratt is up there now,' said Mrs. Mickleham, aware of an element of reprimand and with a certain dryness.

'And all's well that ends in hot buttered toast,' said Mr. Chantry; and the tea was poured out, Philippa sitting in a high-backed chair behind the pretty service that Cosima had chosen so carefully to go with the chintzes, and Aldous pretended to believe that everything was still happy, sitting on a low hassock beside his child, and under all the light talk Cosima's thought dwelt on the look of interchanged love that she had seen. How long it had been since Aldous had looked at her like that! — Had he ever looked at her quite like that — with that security of understanding? — Never; or never since the very first. Never since the dark shadow of Philippa had slanted in between them from a letter opened in a sunny courtyard — she saw it suddenly and a feeling of giddiness went over her — where a parrot trod up and down on its perch and Aldous, with a set white face, slipped the letter into his little case. — 'Paramour.' — The word shot suddenly into her mind. 'Paramour.' — And she had forgiven that word; for his sake. She swallowed on tears while she drank her tea.

Letters were brought in as they finished and,

gathering up her little pile, Cosima said that she would go to rest.

'I've one from Timmie! — How sweet of him!' said Philippa. — She glanced at it, laughing, for it was signed: 'Your faithful Middle-White.' — 'Oh — I do hope you'll be warm now, Cosima. — Shall I come and have another look?' But Cosima said that Pratt would now take care of her, and paused by the door to add: 'Will you come up and see me presently, Aldous?'

His face fell. — Oh — if he could understand what she was feeling he would not look like that! — He had planned some further adventure with Philippa. But he said at once, very sweetly and readily: 'Of course, my dear — I've had my fill of the river for to-day.'

'The river! — But I have a mind for the river! The wind has dropped, I think,' said Mr. Chantry. 'Will you take me on the river, my young châtelaine?'

'It's far too cold for you, Father,' said Cosima. Above her own misery her mind was still alert to detect familiar symptoms in her father's elation. If left too much alone with Philippa, he might try to kiss her.

'The wind has dropped,' said Philippa, ever so

kindly. 'And he'll keep his fur coat on and we'll take this rug' — she picked it off the sofa — 'for his legs.'

'And perhaps,' thought Cosima as she reluctantly assented, 'he'll behave himself if he's tightly enough swaddled! — When will you come, Aldous?'

'In half an hour? Will that be all right? — I've a few letters to finish,' said Aldous, but he, too, looked reluctantly at the young and the old figures departing by the window. It was the river with Philippa he was hating to miss.

CHAPTER XIV

PRATT was closing the last drawers when Aldous went up half an hour later, Cosima's evening panoply was disposed on the Chesterfield, and under her eiderdown in the flickering firelight she lay smoking, her silken sleeve falling from her arm. 'I do hope you find it warm,' he said, drawing a chair to the bedside and leaning forward to clasp her arm for a moment. — 'Can't you put on something woolly to come down over your wrists? — I ought to have remembered to tell Mrs. Mickleham. — Philippa is a harum-scarum child about such things.'

'I know. — Yes, it's all right now. — It's quite all right, Aldous darling. Everything's all right when I'm with you again. — I've missed you dreadfully; — simply dreadfully,' said Cosima, smiling at him through her smoke, yet to his apprehension, sharpened by long experience, not quite spontaneously. 'Of course Philippa *isn't* a child. You must make up your mind to that, very soon, and the sooner the better, my poor darling. — I

know how hateful it must be to see a young thing growing up — and away.'

'Not away,' he returned, smiling back at her and keeping her lightness. 'It will never be away with me and Philippa.'

'Ah — Aldous dear, you're ingenuous,' she sighed, removing her cigarette and looking at its tip. Then, altering her tone: 'I've planned a delightful little party for her. — Can Jennifer and the brother come?'

'Yes. Philippa heard this morning. They're coming on Thursday.'

'I asked the Basingham girl and Ronnie Carteret — I saw she liked him — and Ossie Threnton. — That will make three couples of bright young things and the men will have to go to Mrs. Mickleham; — they're very comfortable there, Timmie told me. — I hoped for Lorrimer to entertain Father, but alas! she's in Somerset. — I've just had her letter' — and from her downy nest Cosima shot a careful glance at her husband.

'Delightful, darling,' he said, and he was pleased; grateful. — 'You know, odious as it is to think of one's child marrying — you see through me, Cosima — I shouldn't mind her marrying young Carteret in ten years' time. He's a charming

fellow; really charming, and almost as clever as she is. And she's turned down Roger Wedderburn, who would have been my second choice, already.'

'Turned him down? You mean to say he's proposed? At her age?'

'Well, as you say, she's not a child. I gather — *entre nous* (Philippa meant it very much *entre nous*, but she tells me everything) — that he did propose, the other day, in London, and that's why he isn't to be with us. — I'm afraid she's very callous where amorous youths are concerned,' said Aldous, and she detected not only his intimate satisfaction, but a faint flavour of fatherly complacency in a prowess from which he had nothing to fear.

'Ah; yes. Poor fellow. — But it's good for them at that age to know reverses. — And he's very callow, isn't he? — Hardly more than a babe and suckling. He wouldn't, of course, have a chance with a girl of his own age. At Philippa's age my heart was fixed only on my elders; — that's why Eustace — alas! — found me such easy prey. Young Wedderburn would have been a rather drab match for her, wouldn't he? — We don't want her to marry in that *milieu*, do we? — When did her young American turn up again, Aldous?'

'Her young American!' How Aldous stared!

She was almost sorry for him as she saw his stare — but remembering all the unspoken things, the unkindnesses worse than cruelties, she steadied her heart.

'Yes. Challoner Day. I know you felt me intolerably silly about him; I am silly, I know; too feeble altogether for this rough world; but I confess that when I read Lorrimer's letter, I had a pang. — I would have put my pride in my pocket and asked him to stay, Aldous, rather than have her meet him like that in the Park.'

'Lorrimer's letter? In the Park? I don't understand you.'

'Ah-ha, my young lady,' said Cosima to herself, watching the narrow red mount in her husband's cheek, 'I've put a spoke in *your* wheel!' — What an extraordinary thing to think at such a moment, but these were the words that returned to her from Heaven knew how far away, so that flowing in between her and Aldous, between her and her so craftily prepared triumph, came a picture of herself as a very young girl, a child almost, staring, rather as Aldous stared now, at her mother, who, her hands lifted to her tresses before her dressing-table, laughed an ugly laugh and said: 'Ah-ha, my young lady — I've put a spoke in *your* wheel!' It was a

housemaid who had just been dismissed for discovered pilfering, and behind the forms of incensed employer and degraded employee had lurked a sorry little history, divined even then by the young Cosima, a history in which her father had been discreditably concerned. She had felt, looking at her mother, shrinking from her, that she was vulgar in her triumph, and now she heard the very words given to her out of the past; a disconcerting legacy. 'Why, didn't you know, Aldous?' she said. 'I thought of course you knew.' And because of her inner soliloquy her gaze had an unintended hardness. 'Lorrimer saw them walking in the Park — last week. I thought of course that you had seen him, too; — or that Philippa would have told you.' How deep must be her bitterness, how horribly Aldous must have hurt her — and how she must hate Philippa — that at a moment like this, putting aside the odious memory of her mother, she should pitilessly rejoice to see the knife turn in his heart. Philippa told him everything. He had just said it. No father and child ever united as were he and Philippa. 'But of course it's all right, Aldous dear,' she added. 'All girls walk where they like nowadays, and with whom. — Don't look so heavy-fatherish.'

'I suppose,' he said slowly, thinking only of Philippa, giving no thought to her at all — except in repudiation — 'that it's because we made her feel put out. If it hadn't been for your behaviour about him last summer, she would never have dreamed of hiding it from me. — You forced me to it — you remember. I felt it insufferable at the time.'

Her heart seemed to stop still in her side; to stop and to listen. Was he really going to kill her because of Philippa? 'I am so glad that you can find a victim' — she, too, spoke very slowly and only after a silence. 'It's always a comfort to find a victim, isn't it, Aldous? And of course I know that I shall always be the burnt offering to Philippa.'

He got up. 'You've been glad ever since you read the letter to think that you could do her an ill turn. — All that you've ever hoped for is to sow discord between us.'

'Aldous! — Aldous' — she was aghast at hearing him. She stretched out her hand, then drew it back and covered her face. 'How dare you!' she muttered.

He walked to the window. 'Here they come,' he said under his breath, 'and we must get through the evening. Of course she will explain it when I see her.

Of course it's nothing; nothing at all. — I'm sorry,' he said. — At the sight of Philippa walking up through the sunset, life was reinstating itself within him. 'I'm afraid I've been very rude. You must forgive me — but it seemed to me that you were glad to see me astonished.'

'Don't say anything.' She still kept her hand before her eyes. 'I'm very tired. — I won't come down. — That will be quite in order. — You often tire me — don't you? Please don't come in again to-night. — Your room is ready.'

'I'm really very sorry,' he repeated, and still it was not of her he was thinking, for suddenly, turning from the window, he added: 'May I see Mrs. Cranley's letter?'

'By all means. — Take it. I've been telling no lies.' She lifted her hand from her face to toss the letter over the eiderdown to the foot of the bed and he came in his humiliation and took it and, standing in the fading light, read: 'Who should I see, as I was driving across the Park to Paddington, but the subjugating Philippa and her captive American. — You remember the one she ran away with at Nollekyns — with the hard-boiled Mamma. — You didn't tell me he was in London nor so intimate. They weren't holding hands; but they made a

tender picture under the almond-trees. — Would Aldous like that match? — I'm too sorry, darling, that I can't be with you ——' Aldous laid down the letter. 'I see,' he said. 'Yes, I see. — She is rather insolent. But she thought she was writing only for your eyes.'

'You are rather insolent, I think.'

'As I said, I beg your pardon. You have administered something of a shock. — But I understand. Of course Philippa was shy about him after last summer. — That's all I meant to say. She is engaged in no clandestine intrigue.'

The word woke hideous echoes in her. 'Please go,' she muttered. 'I know all that you meant to say.'

CHAPTER XV

OF COURSE he must wait till next morning. He must not spoil Philippa's night. She must guess, as they played cut-throat with old Chantry, that something was amiss. But he kept his smile for her as he kissed her good-night. She was near to him, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, as no one had ever been or could be, and without her he would be irremediably alone. He had lost everything in the world except Philippa. He saw that clearly, though, as he lay awake, seeing her as a wreathed and smiling witch, willing to hurt (the memory of the hurts assailed him) — perfidious, almost as Cosima was perfidious. Had she deceived him, keeping this secret from him during all this happiest week? Was she in love with Challoner Day? How long had they written to each other, seen each other — as they must have been doing to walk so confidently in the Park — making the tender picture under the almond-trees? He knew, lying rigidly in his own bed, that it was Cosima who thus contaminated his thoughts of his child — not what she had said, perhaps, but what she was; and the sickness of his heart turned in hatred towards her, lying there in

her silks and satins on the other side of the wall. The memory of her dark eyes, searching him, finding their way to fasten on his blood, was loathsome to him. — 'Poor Beth!' he thought, with infinite bitterness, his desperate need bringing her to his mind; — for, indeed, since leaving her, Beth had become a corpse to him, something he had killed for ever. He did not want her now; he and Cosima between them had killed her; but he wanted the mother of his child — who would cherish, understand, and keep her safe for him. — How could a child be safe with her divorced father and his paramour? And, with the memory of the cruel word, the memory of Beth shone on his turmoil in all its gentleness and integrity and selflessness.

He had asked Philippa, in saying good-night, to meet him in the garden early, and she came down to him through the dewy grass to where he stood at the edge of the river, smiling at him from afar, but gravely, as though she knew he had something special to say to her, and, as they met and before they kissed, she asked: 'What is it, Daddy?'

'Philippa,' he said, for he could not keep it back for one instant now that she was there alone with him, 'why have you been meeting Challoner Day in the Park without telling me?'

It was a stroke across her brightness. She did not darken; she did not flush or hide from him. But brightness was struck from her face and like a dagger-thrust her retort went to his heart: 'What has Cosima said?'

'How do you know it's Cosima?' he answered, and in his sickness, his faintness, for it was no less, hearing avowal in her challenge, he saw her riven from him, saw her again as clandestine, intriguing, her sincerity already calculated, like Cosima's. 'Anyone could have seen you, it seems.'

'Only Cosima could have told you to make you look at me like that,' Philippa answered.

As he heard her, as he saw her face turn from him, proudly, with dilated nostril and stubborn underlip, a deep balm began to steal through him. She was not against him; only against Cosima. If she had hidden from him, it was because Cosima was there between them. 'Mrs. Cranley saw you, and wrote to Cosima about it. Cosima had the letter last evening. She asked about it innocently, thinking I knew,' he said, his voice stumbling as it paid lip-service to loyalty. — 'She was a little hurt, of course — because of last summer — but quite understood that you didn't feel it natural to have him at her house after what had happened.'

'A little hurt?' Philippa repeated, and now she turned her head and smiled at him, the smile of the wreathed witch. 'Why, Daddy — she must have been perfectly rapturous when she found you didn't know.'

'Philippa, Philippa' — he muttered, eyeing her; 'you must spare me.'

'Don't I always — darling? It's she who never does.'

'Because she knows I love you best. — She's a woman. You'd be the same in her place, Philippa.' He saw it all at last, the balm stealing through him, making him whole; dissolving his hatred for Cosima and setting her far, far away, so far that he could be just to her; absolutely just. Here was Philippa, his again; never before so near him; Cosima was only someone to whom he owed a careful loyalty.

'Yes; that's true,' said Philippa, smiling her hard smile at him. 'I wonder you see that, Daddy; — so few men would. And all the same I think I strike with a knife; I don't comb your hair with a poisoned comb.'

He held her hand in his arm now, tightly against his heart, and they were walking along the little river path, startled birds flying up out of the reeds

and bushes before them. Larks were singing above the meadows. 'Tell me what has happened,' he said.

'I ought to have told you, of course,' said Philippa. 'I don't know why I didn't — unless it was because last summer, here with you that morning, made me shy. But of course Mummie knew all about it. It was Mummie's address I gave him in that letter I wrote to him — telling him that I'd be there, with her, if he ever came again to England. And that was all there was to it, Daddy. He wrote to me and said he was to be here for a week, and he took us all to the play — Mummie and Billy and Grannie and Ida Metcalfe; and they all liked him as much as I did and he came to tea twice. He really is such a dear, Daddy, and his being an American makes him all the dearer somehow — because one knows one's going to lose him so soon, perhaps; — and he gave me a book; have you read "Death Comes to the Archbishop"? — And we had a walk in Kensington Gardens, the day before he left for the Continent. He's joining his mother and sister there. He's going to Greece; he's travelling all over Europe, for more than a year; and then he's going back to New York to finish studying architecture. — And that's really all there is to

it, Daddy' — Philippa lifted her eyes, clear as the larks' song — 'and anybody could have seen us walking in the Park, of course.'

The larks' song now seemed to be the balm; circling and mounting in his blood. His own child; his Philippa; who told him everything and, all innocently, in telling dispelled most foolish fears. They had all liked the young American as much as she did; one liked him the more for knowing one had to lose him. 'And that was why you went to your mother for the week?' he said.

At this Philippa paused and looked at the river, at the trees, at the meadows beyond; keeping nothing back; but taking counsel. 'I don't think I ought to say so, if it was, Daddy,' she said, after a moment; 'not to you. — Because I *ought* to have gone, oughtn't I; but perhaps hearing that he was coming made me think of it.' She still looked away and deeper things than this avowal were striving in her; old, old things; things half-forgotten, but stealing back to life within her. Daddy; her darling Daddy; never so truly hers, she knew, as now when she had so terribly hurt him, so terribly shaken him. It was an impulse to make that unity flawless that rose in Philippa, but it was also the impulse to atone for what she could not have said. Something

unshared, unsharable, was there, singing a wordless song deep in her heart: a well of happiness and wonder that could flow out and enclose Daddy and transfigure life, but that could never be told. And because of this, because he had been so afraid and was now so happy, the impulse rose too strongly to be checked, lead her where it would. 'There's one more thing — just one more — that I've kept from you, Daddy,' she said suddenly, in a low voice, leaning close to him as they went along the path. 'Do you remember, long ago, at Rest Harrow, when you lost me on the Downs?'

'Remember?' His heart stood still and seemed to mutter to itself: 'Remember?'

'I wasn't lost, Daddy. I told you a lie.'

'What do you mean, my darling?'

'I was miserable. I was jealous. I couldn't bear to see you following her; forgetting me. So I lost myself. I ran away purposely and lost myself, to punish you, to frighten you, to make you think of me.'

He was still for a moment, walking swiftly, holding her hand now in his, his head bent low to listen. 'But I was always thinking of you. I was thinking of you all the time.'

'No; not all the time; you forgot me, because of

her. So, I lied to you. Perhaps it was fair, Daddy. I think a child comes first.'

'Philippa; — Philippa' — he could find nothing more to say. Only after they had turned a corner of the path and gone for a long way under the willow-trees, did he add: 'It meant a great deal, what you did that day, Philippa.'

'I know.' Her voice was as low as his. 'I know it did. Perhaps it meant everything. That's why I had to tell you now. I longed to tell you then, when you found me; I was going to; only you called her Cosima — and you never had before. — And then, I tried again' — she stopped short. — 'And was interrupted.'

'Interrupted?'

'It's all over. It's all past now,' said Philippa. She had turned very pale, and with a cold strange look her eyes fixed themselves far from him on the distant fields.

'It's not past while you keep something back. Interrupted? When did you try again?'

She had not meant this. She had not known, seeking complete unity, that it would lead her here. She bent her eyes on the path and, held closely by him, felt herself trembling. How could she tell her father this? That old pity for Cosima rose up in her

and struggled against his urgency. 'Daddy — Ought one? — Even for love — when other people come in? I made Mummie promise never to tell you, too. It makes no difference now.'

'Your mother? What had she to do with it? What did you tell her?' But a premonition had come to him, a memory — of a passionately beating heart; his heart; of words that had broken from it under an intolerable pressure: 'I love you better than anything in the world.' — Words that had been the turning-point of his life. 'Did you see anything — hear anything — to stop you?'

'Yes. That night.' She could not keep it back. She felt as if he saw into her hidden thought; and, as Beth had done, years before, for her, so she now felt herself, for him, picking her way among hot ploughshares. 'I couldn't bear it. I got up to come to you. And I saw her go into your room.'

It was over. All was said. She bent her head and did not look at him, and for a long time he said nothing. He held her hand in an unaltered clasp while the strange feeling came that she was a woman, as old as he was in understanding, with whom he communed in silence. When at last he spoke, he found words for her need as much as for his own. 'There was nothing wrong. She did not stay. She was

very unhappy. I had been harsh to her — about you. — That was all.'

'That was what Mummie said.'

'Your mother said that?'

'Yes. When I told her. And that we couldn't help caring.'

Another thought, again half-memory, half-premonition, came to him as he heard her, and as it came hot colour mounted to his cheek and he felt it flame there. 'When did you tell her?'

'When? — After we came back, you and I. Don't you remember how different I was, that morning, in the train?'

'You mean it was before I went away to Birmingham?'

'Oh, yes. Before you went away.' She sought her memory. 'The night of the day I saw you for the last time, on the stairs, Daddy, when you told me to wash the paint off. Mummie dined with Grannie and Ida and you were dining out. I called her up to me when I heard her come in. I knew she was frightfully unhappy, but I had to see her because I was so miserable all by myself and so frightened. I didn't mean to tell her anything; but I did. About my lie, and how I'd been interrupted.'

'I see.'

Not faithless, perhaps; not faithless as Beth — in spite of her brave words to their child — must have believed him; but a traitor to their love. In those words spoken to Cosima he had betrayed his past and Beth's past. And he had dared accuse her of poisoning Philippa's mind against him. — He remembered it all, now; all; her staring, wild, disfigured face, and his fatuity and cruelty and hateful selfishness. A great breath that was almost a groan lifted his breast as he walked, held by their child. Poor, loyal, stricken Beth; dead to him for ever; dead because so set afar, so unapproachable, so sacred. But he felt her again, thus revealed, his wife in very truth, indissolubly; and all the interlude between that night of treachery and now had been spent with a stranger. He saw a stranger coming into the sunlight at Chinon with her painted mouth and searching eyes. Living; not dead and sacred. Living, and waiting for him up there at the house. 'Poor Daddy,' he heard Philippa say, and she walked beside him gently and compassionately; almost as Beth's spirit might have walked.

CHAPTER XVI

COSIMA did not wake that morning till Pratt brought in her early tea, and, as she saw her drawing the curtains apart upon a flood of sunlight and heard through the open window the soft fluting of a bird, a sudden childlike happiness in the sun, the song, the sense of spring and of escape from darkness, so filled her that for a moment the dreadful sorrow with which she had lain awake till three seemed like a dream now dispelled.

'It's a lovely day, isn't it, Pratt?' she said, holding to the loveliness. 'Is that a blackbird? Draw back the curtains wide so that I can see out.' And she raised herself on her pillows and saw the blue-and-white of the sky, and the meadows, all misted, beyond the river.

'Yes, madam, a blackbird; it's on the roof,' said Pratt.

The blackbird kept the radiance round her as she poured out her tea and drank, saying to herself, with a child's power of make-believe: 'Suppose it wasn't true; suppose it hadn't happened like that last evening; suppose I could begin all over again and go down after breakfast and smile at them and

that we could all enjoy the day together.' Why not? Why could they not all be happy? Did she and Philippa really hate each other? The child — she had felt it from the time at Rest Harrow — was not averse from her, found in her, indeed, something of the same charm that her father found — Cosima had known that at once — and appreciated her pretty turns of thought even more accurately than he did. And she had found Philippa rather endearing; rather compelling and stimulating. Yes; if it hadn't been for Aldous, they might have been really fond of each other.

When Pratt had gone and her tea was drunk, she lay down again and listened to the blackbird. How heavenly! It *was* heaven, and it summoned one to answer and to enter and take possession of the offered bliss. Why not? she asked herself again. Why could she not put aside all thought of pride and grief and anger and go down and smile at them? It was only love that kept them apart. Her love for Aldous, his for Philippa and hers for him. But not the heavenly love. — She put her arms above her head and tried to think. How horrible, how irreparable had it really been? What had she said? Why, nothing; she had only shrunk from his cruelty and covered her eyes. And what had he said?

She tried to reconstruct the horrid clash, closing her eyes to think with more intensity; but it was not words that came; only his face; his white face of flashing scorn; his dagger glance; and the song was further away now and fell on duller ears. Oh, how hard it was to enter Paradise! — There it shone before her, almost within her grasp, it seemed; yet it was far, far away; to enter, one must cut off one's hand and put out one's eyes — and forget. How much better to end as it had ended with dear Jack; in death; all safe; all lovely and unspoiled. It had been so much lovelier with Aldous than with Jack — yet this was what it had come to; terrible words and looks more terrible. She and Aldous had hated each other last night, and if, because of the sun and the blackbird, she was not hating him now, he was hating her. 'Is it too late? Have I really lost him?' she asked herself. And still, in the darkness of her questioning, she heard from far away the blackbird's song and its peaceful urgency: — Come forth into the day. Lift up your hearts, all ye people. — How strange the old half-forgotten words. If she could obey and enter into Paradise, would he not love her again? Would he not love her best?

She had her breakfast and got up and had her bath, and sitting in her dressing-gown beside the

open window looked out while Pratt did her hair. 'It's quite warm enough for a thin dress, madam,' said Pratt. 'And you could slip on your fur-lined jacket if you felt chilly; but there's a good fire in the drawing-room.' It was already past ten by the time the toilet was over and Cosima's pearls clasped behind her neck. She looked at herself for a long moment in the glass when Pratt had left her. Eyes, hair, softly tinted lips above the pearls; she was lovely. She listened for the blackbird, but it had long ago stopped singing.

Rising, she took up the little fur-lined satin jacket that Pratt had laid for her, and as she turned from her table her eye was caught by the sight of Philippa running up quickly towards the house. As she came, the figure of Aldous emerged below and they met in the middle of the slope. He caught her hand and she held him off — her face averted; — angry — Cosima saw that, yet she laughed, too, a hasty laugh; and, as he held her thus, at arms' length, questioning, she spoke a few words and then ran on, leaving Aldous standing stiffly, looking towards the river, and from the river path Cosima, her heart sinking darkly, saw the figure of her own father emerging. She knew then what had happened. She had known it happen before. His

jaunty gait was familiar to her, and the one-sided lilt with which he carried himself, his hands clasped behind him as he feigned a blithe preoccupation with the sweetness of the day.

'Old fool!' she muttered under her breath. 'Old fool!' — yet, as she watched Aldous walking slowly forward to meet him, another anger mingled with the anger against her father. Not a coward, not a skulker; — he went forward to meet Aldous, and after all what a silly fuss over nothing! — What if he had snatched a kiss or two? — Hard-lipped, hot-eyed, her breast rising and falling in quick breaths, she watched the swift short interchange. Aldous flung aside from it and came back to the house, and after a sauntering pause along the river edge her father, too, slowly returned. 'Old fool!' Cosima repeated. She felt herself involved in his humiliation, dragged down with him and relegated to an inferior order of being, and, the affinity of blood revealing itself in its repulsion, a sick sense of pity struggled with her rage. 'It only needed this!' she muttered. 'And at this moment!'

She went to her door, opened it a crack, and listened. Aldous had gone into his study. Still listening, her ear caught no sound of talk. Philippa must be in her room. They would not talk about it.

And Aldous would not speak of it to her. Never speak of it. But it would be there between them; her father, and she, with him, relegated.

Swiftly she ran down the stairs, paused at the drawing-room door, opened it softly, and went in. Her father sat there alone, his chair pulled into the sunlight beside the window, a small volume in his hand which she recognised — with a sense of sick irony — as a volume of the poetry he so often carried about with him — 'Hoping,' she thought, 'to be found, like Shelley, drowned with poetry in his pocket.' He was trying to burn with a pure gemlike flame. And she saw — flung at her out of the past — the face of the silly little housemaid with red lips and blue eyes and fluffy golden hair; — frightened; crying. — No father to take care of her.

She shut the door, and he looked round to meet her dark stare.

'Well?' she questioned him. 'What is it? I saw the meeting. Had you been forgetting that Philippa isn't a housemaid?'

Mr. Chantry looked at his daughter for a moment and then back at his book. He turned a page and glanced up at the top of the next one. 'You mustn't be impertinent, too, my dear child,' he

commented. 'A tempest in a teapot; that's all that it comes to.'

'That's for me to judge! — You used, no doubt, to call it a tempest in a teapot when you seduced the maids and made Mother wretched.' She wanted to lash him, yet she was horribly sorry for him, and she felt that with all its pretentiousness his bearing was not without its dignity. 'Why couldn't you leave the child alone?' she said. 'You know that Aldous looks upon her as sacrosanct. — What happened? I insist on hearing.'

'Nothing happened, my dear child; nothing could happen — I may, perhaps, be allowed to remind you — and that your use of certain words is singularly unbecoming, unbecoming not only in connection with your husband's child, but in connection with me. Nothing happened,' he repeated. 'I was walking with her along the river path, feeling her very pretty, very young and pretty, and we were talking happily of Wagner's music — which she dislikes — they are mad on Mozart, these young people — and I put my arm round her — to ward off some bushes — and just bent my lips to her cheek; the merest parental salute; hardly a brush, I'll take my word; — and the little minx turned on me and struck me in the face; yes, in the face, my dear,'

Mr. Chantry particularised, while a dull colour mounted to it. 'I don't know what she told her father,' he added; 'but he spoke to me rather impertinently. — However, it's a matter of no consequence. He lost his temper and I did not lose mine. That's the essential. So don't give it a further thought. — Least said, soonest mended,' said Mr. Chantry, turning his eyes back to his book.

Cosima stood and surveyed him. She hated him; yet she hated Aldous more — and Philippa, banded together against her and her father. 'I should think that you might have restrained your tendencies here, at this time,' she said, standing with her arms hanging heavily at her sides and speaking in a voice of concentrated contempt. 'Some things don't mend, and I remember well enough what Mother had to endure — till she could endure it no longer. — I did think that you'd have managed to keep your hands off Philippa. — How they must despise you — both of them!'

'My dear' — her father lifted his eyes to her: — they were large, dark eyes, and as he looked at her now, heavily enough, though not angrily, she again felt the contagion of community, for it was her own look. — 'You are rather merciless. My tendencies, as you call them, are the perfectly normal ones of

a vigorous, affectionate man. There's nothing of the satyr about me — if that's what you're suggesting, and I've done nothing worse than make love to the women who attracted me and whom I attracted; no more and no less than other men. Of your mother I'll say nothing; our disputes and differences are no affair of yours; but I may remind you, in all tenderness, that if I am of the exuberant, romantic type, you resemble me in mind and body, rather than her. You, too, have had your romances, my poor Cosima; but I've never at any time reproached you with them or made their consequences unpalatable to you: quite the contrary; I've stood beside you, and always will. Only don't insult me; it's not playing fair.'

As he spoke, a sense of deadly sickness was creeping through her. There was truth in every word he said, and it was a truth that set Aldous far, far away from her. It was a truth that Aldous, perhaps, had never really divined, or had refused to believe in. She had tried to live on the level where he placed her, and, if this dreadful disintegration was coming to their lives, was it not because, deep under everything, he had come to realise, unconsciously, that they were aliens? She turned her eyes away from her father. 'I'm very unhappy,' she

muttered. 'And you've made it terribly more difficult for me than it was before.'

'If what I've done — taking a kiss from a pretty child — has made it so much more difficult, you must be very unhappy, indeed,' said Mr. Chantry. 'I beg your pardon for my error, Cosima, and I may say that whatever your husband had said to me, however difficult he had made it for me to remain here, I would have played up rather than give you any trouble. But if he can't succeed in being civil to me or in making you happy — I think we had both better go away,' said Mr. Chantry, and a dark look, the echo of Cosima's own, crossed his face. 'Come back with me to your own home; to Rest Harrow; — and to your own house, and friends, and world. — You have no need of him or of his daughter. All you have to do is to get into your car and drive away.'

She stood, her head sunken down on her breast, and the fear that had dogged her life ever since she could remember lapped dully into her heart. 'I'm in love with him,' she muttered after a moment. 'What shall I do, Father? — I'm in love with him, and he'd cut me into a thousand pieces to please Philippa.'

'Don't exaggerate, Cosima,' said her father,

after a silence. She felt him looking across at her now with a singular tenderness, controlled, austere in its intentness; for he was thinking of her, only of her; not of himself. 'He's a Celt; hot of nerve and cold of heart; but he does care for you. — You're the only woman who's ever warmed his icy blood, I'll answer for it.'

'Oh, Father!' — The tears fell down her face. 'How horrible I've been to you! How horrible children are to their parents! — Forgive me!'

'My darling,' said her father, looking across at her, but still making no movement towards her, 'I love you better than anything in life, and you know it. — I'd cut *him* into a thousand pieces to please you; but what I'm considering is your happiness, and if you're still in love with him, bear with it for a little longer. He's harassed; I saw that last night; he's torn between you both, and the little minx is craftier than you are in holding her own, my poor Cosima. — But she'll soon marry and he'll be thankful then to have you to turn to.'

She stood there, sunken, raising a hand now to wipe the tears away, trying to remember something with which these words of comfort were strangely out of tune. — They were the words of her world, of her father's world; not of Aldous's and Philippa's;

— not — oh, how far less! — words of Paradise. But they were words of wisdom, and if one could not reach Paradise, was not wisdom the next best thing? For it, too, meant a bending of the head if not a humbling of the heart. And, as she thought of her father's love, what came to her, with such an inner turning to long past things, was the memory of herself as a little girl running to his arms for comfort. An ugly little girl; she had been made to feel that by her beautiful mother; — though her father thought her lovely and said that she was like a Goya; — but she had been ugly; with large sullen mouth and sallow skin and eyes set in sickly circles; a nervous, fretful, whining child, exasperating to her mother, who had slapped her once and made her father furious. — 'I won't allow it! Do you understand! — I don't care what she's done. — She's ill and delicate — and I won't have a finger laid upon her!' he had cried, glowering over at his angry wife. He had always been there to take refuge with, all through her life. He did not care what she had done. He was to her what Aldous was to Philippa. He would forgive everything.

'I must think. — I must see him,' she muttered. 'He's not come near me since last night.'

'My dear child — let me give you a word of

advice. — Don't see him in the state you're in. You'll do yourself no good. — When will women ever learn not to take the dregs of feeling to a scene? Wait till you're rested; composed; calm.'

'When will men ever learn — Daddy — that it doesn't rest women to wait? — The longer one waits the deeper one sinks into the dregs. We tear ourselves to pieces, Daddy; — to pieces. — That's how I've spent my life! No; I must see him. — He was unkind to me last night; horribly unkind — because of Philippa,' Cosima muttered, slowly turning the door-handle and with her head still bent down.

'Unkind? Yesterday? And what had he to reproach you with? — I should think, however infatuated a father he may be, that he could not fail to recognise your quite extraordinary generosity towards the child; — quite extraordinary; from the beginning, when you consented to have her come and live with you,' said Mr. Chantry, and the dark flush again mounted to his brows. 'They both owe you a most careful and conscious gratitude. — But you must judge for yourself. You must judge for yourself.' Mr. Chantry rose and went to stand at the window, looking out, his back to her. 'Only — if he's unkind — all you need do is to get into your car and come with me to Rest Harrow.'

CHAPTER XVII

ALDOUS was sitting at his bureau, facing the door, and the light from the northern window fell coldly on his lean, foreshortened face, bent low over his papers, and on his tossed grey hair. He was controlling himself to concentration after the fury of his encounter with his father-in-law, and it was just so that his old Scottish grandmother would have looked up, with just that testy stare, to focus her far blue gaze on an unwelcome intrusion. Cosima's heart, as she crossed the hall, giving herself no time for irresolution, had felt dissolved within her, dissolved with fear and yet with a strange hope, remembering of her father's last words but the one sentence that, with its selfless insight, had made her his child again: 'He does care for you.' — And might not that insight prove true? Might it not be that Aldous, divining all that she had felt and suffered since they parted, would look at her gently and tell her that all could yet be well? She closed the door and leaned back against it, fixing her dark gaze upon him.

But he saw her with a terrible distaste. As she

stood there before him, those searching eyes fastening upon him, what came to him was the memory of her father's face, intent, jaunty, odiously sheepish, too, and unable to evade one lash from the stinging whip he had applied. — 'Oh — nothing — *nothing*, Daddy,' he heard Philippa say, hanging away from his detaining hand, her eyes still sparkling with anger. 'He *is* rather horrid — that's all — and I'm sorry if I've been frightfully rude — but I *had* to hit him because I simply can't stand being kissed and pawed over!' Outrageous old hound! was what he had felt, letting his child run on and walking slowly to meet his father-in-law, fixing a fell glare upon him. And now, in his wife's face, he saw her father's. She was like him. Horribly like him. How had he not seen it before? And, deeper things coming into his vision of her as she stood thus silent, the word 'wife' returned with its other, its sacred associations — as it had returned in the river walk that morning. This was not his wife and he would not call her so. This woman with her searching eyes was a stranger to him, or only not a stranger because of the intimacy of his repulsion.

'Well?' he said, and he held his voice to icy courtesy. 'I'm busy as you see. Is there anything you want to say?'

Her face changed as she heard these words. He saw it change, grow very white, and then slowly, dully, red. Cosima flushed with difficulty; he was sorry to see the flush, knowing what floods of emotion underlay it; and his pity added to his repulsion. — And someone else had leaned back against a door like that and looked at him — how differently — in terror.

'How much longer is this to go on?' She spoke at last, and as he heard her a bitter weariness rose up in him to oppose her.

'Not much longer, I hope,' he said, 'because I want to get on with my work. I've had enough interruptions already this morning.'

'Have you? Indeed. Perhaps I have, too. Not very cheering, you'll admit, to wake and pray for strength to get through the day and carry on the programme I'd planned for your daughter, and find that she'd started it by striking my father — and you by insulting him. — No! — Not a word!' — she interrupted him fiercely, seeing him about to speak. — 'Don't think that I defend him! — Or that he defends himself. But I saw your meeting, and challenged him. I felt it a little more than I could bear, all things considered. — For however foolish he is, you might both have shown a little

mercy if only because he is my father and that from me you both receive — everything. — But it's not that! We won't speak of that! — It's you. It's you and I. It's your cruelty, your insolence towards me. — For you spoke last night with insolence.'

Aldous still held his pen in his fingers and he looked down at it and turned it to and fro, taking thought, taking careful thought, unmoved by this onslaught except to contemptuous caution. 'About last night and what you call my insolence — and as far as I can recall what happened, it was I who used the word of Mrs. Cranley's letter,' he said, — 'I'm glad to have this occasion for telling you that you are singularly mistaken about Philippa's meeting with her friend. She arranged with him last summer that if he returned he was to see her at her mother's, since you had refused to receive him, and since she wanted to spare me any further discomfort. It was all most admirably devised and carried out, like everything she undertakes. — He had tea with them all and took them to the play, and Beth, I gather, found him charming. — So that not the most evilly minded person could detect anything amiss in the relationship.'

Cosima leaned against the door and her eyes dwelt on him; not searching now; glazed with the

heat of her heavy flush, they seemed, like the blunted antennæ of an insect, palpably to touch, to recognise, to draw away. 'Do you mean that I am an evilly minded person?' she asked.

Aldous held the pen by both ends and bent at it. 'I wasn't thinking of you: only of a certain state of mind. — Of Mrs. Cranley's, perhaps, and her easy talk of running off and captives,' he said. 'I mean nothing offensive. But it is true, I feel, that you and Philippa breathe a different air and that things to you matters of course would be to her unthinkable.'

The scorched antennæ, struck to stillness, faced him. 'You are daring to remind me of what you would call my "past." — You are daring to use that lash — in order to abase me before your child?'

'Nonsense!' The angry red mounted to his cheek. 'Your past has nothing to do with what I mean. I am incapable of what you suppose — what you pretend to suppose.'

'Incapable! Of what are you not capable when your child is in question? You trample me in the mud to lift her!' And, as he made no reply, fixing his eyes on the pen he bent and bent at, she went on, her voice striking at him in a helpless rage: 'She's talked you well round, I see. She could wind you round her little finger! She's crafty, that young

lady — when it comes to holding her own! — Admirably devised was it! I daresay it was! Devised since last summer and kept secret from you! — and she'd never have told you if Lorrimer hadn't seen her! — I'm saying nothing against her or her flirtations. I'm only informing you that I understand Philippa a good deal better than you do or ever will! — A different air! I recognise her air! It's the air all girls breathe when they're in love and want to hide it! — I saw that she'd fallen in love last summer at Nollekyns. — I saw yesterday that she'd been made love to. — You've swallowed her story — and so has Beth — but remember what I say when Mr. Chal carries her off to New York!'

'Perhaps you'll leave me,' said Aldous. He had laid down the pen and drew his papers towards him, and his hand trembled. 'You've only come in order to attack and vilify Philippa.'

'You call it vilifying a girl to say that she's in love! — Philippa and I breathe precisely the same air! That is all I ask to show you!'

'I'm glad to say you don't succeed,' Aldous muttered, and, though his hand still trembled, a faint smile crossed his face — remembering Philippa and the air they had both breathed that morning by the river.

Cosima stood silent then, and for a long moment, while he did not look at her, but down at the papers he pretended to arrange, she gazed at him. 'What a fool I've been,' she said at last in a low voice. 'What a pitiful fool — to have trusted you.' He made no reply. 'From the very beginning,' she said — 'I see it now — I've idealised and idolised you, and given up everything for you — because of my love. I didn't want to marry you. — You'll remember that. — You forced it on me and dragged me through ignominy because of your prudish middle-class scruples, and I loved you so helplessly that I accepted everything. You forced your hateful child on me, and I accepted that. — From the very beginning you took it for granted that if I wanted you I must want her too. Even after she'd insulted me in the Chinon letter — even when you saw what she thought of me and how she could write of me — your one idea was to have her in our lives. And I accepted. It was gall and wormwood to me, but I accepted. — I did more. I welcomed her. I planned this home for her — to make it easy for you both. I spent for her and made her friends that she never would have made in her own world — found for her the one man that you yourself said you could think of her marrying — and all for love of you. And this

is my return. You use her as a lash against me. You insult me. You turn against me the things that are most sacred to me — my trust in you and in your understanding — my sacrifices — my love. You've ruined my life!' she said, and now she was weeping, her hands before her face, sunken in the dark tempest of her misery. — 'You've ruined my life and everything is over.'

'No; I've not ruined your life,' said Aldous. He did not lift his head and he spoke quietly. 'It's you who've ruined mine, I think.'

She checked her sobs to listen, and as he said no more she questioned — dropping her hands — with wild distraught gaze: 'What do you mean?'

He paused to think, but not for long: 'You've lost nothing,' he said. 'As far as your affair with me goes and what you were generous enough to face for my sake, I think it's only done you good in the eyes of the world. — I've not changed your life. You were broken-hearted when I met you and now you are merely broken-hearted once again. Whereas I've lost wife and home and reputation. — It's I whose life is ruined: — utterly ruined; except for Philippa; and you'd take her from me if you could.'

She did not weep now. She was no longer wild, but cold and deadly, and still he did not lift his eyes

to look at her. He put her out. He had forgotten her. He hated her. And as she stood there, remembering all the past, she heard suddenly that the blackbird — high on a corner of the roof — had begun to sing.

Paradise: the difficult, far-away Paradise: lost for ever. With the fall of the words, for ever, she remembered the Schubert song; the lost souls; eternity. Yes; it was true; it could happen. It was what had happened now to her.

With long, sweet, implacable radiance it flowed about her and searched her out and revealed her, the selfless beauty that, from the beginning, she had turned from and betrayed. From the beginning, with all his cruelty, with all his selfishness, Aldous had been nearer it than she, for his love had known less of self; it had been because of the strain of heavenliness in his love that she had clung to him and followed him. And now it was too late. Darkness had fallen between them. She was shut out for ever.

'Then I'll go,' she said, listening.

'Do go,' was what he answered, and he drew his paper towards him and began to write.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT WAS past twelve o'clock when Philippa heard Monty scratching at her door. She had spent the time in ardent disposal of her wardrobe, planning this dress for an evening and this for an afternoon and laying on each its appropriate scarf or tie or stockings, busying herself consciously, as her father was doing below, in order to hold her mind away from the episode by the river and all its discomposing consequences. She was horribly sorry that she had had to tell Daddy about it, yet knew that if she had not told him her silence might have weighed upon her like a complicity, or like a mercy bestowed where she felt no mercy. And under her superficial bustle lay a dark regret for the unearthly beauty of her hour at dawn so blurred by this later memory.

Monty was scratching hard and he leaped up at her, barking, as she opened to him. 'Why, Monty — where's your mother?' she asked, stooping to take him up.

Pratt was going along the passage, flushed and hurried, with a sheaf of dresses on her arm.

'Monty's looking for Mrs. Wyntringham, Pratt; where is she?' said Philippa.

Pratt hurried on before her into Cosima's room and, following her, Monty in her arms, Philippa saw that it was in confusion, boxes standing open on the floor. 'Haven't you seen her, Miss?' asked Pratt, bending to fold the dresses in a tray.

'Seen her? No. Why?'

'Because she's gone, Miss. She and Mr. Chantry have gone to Rest Harrow.'

Philippa stood still, Monty on her arm, and for a moment did not speak. 'How do you know, Pratt?' she then asked, and an ominous presage stole over her.

'I had a note, Miss — brought in by the boy — from the garage. — Mrs. Wyntringham must have taken up her coat, in the hall, and gone straight out to the car, and Mr. Chantry with her. All she said was that she was not feeling well and was going with Mr. Chantry to Rest Harrow, and that I was to pack all her things and follow round by London with Monty,' said Pratt, speaking very quickly, her kind sagacious eyes passing over Philippa's face. 'Horton is packing Mr. Chantry's valise for me to take, too. It must be a full hour ago.'

The first thought that came to Philippa, con-

sciously, was that she was to part with Monty. She knew, indubitably, that this was the last of Cosima, and, feeling the sleek, warm form against her side, a strange pang went through her. 'I do hope she's not really ill,' she found, for she and Pratt must keep up appearances. 'Can't I help you, Pratt?' She put Monty down and picked up a pair of satin shoes.

'Well, thank you, Miss. Gladys would give me a hand. It'll not take long. Yes — the books at the bottom. Thank you, Miss.'

Philippa had taken up the little pile of books that lay on the table beside the bed. She glanced at them as she knelt by the box to put them in: — a modern volume of verse, a recent novel, and a little old battered volume, strangely familiar. So familiar that Philippa opened it and saw her father's name in his young handwriting on the fly-leaf — *Cosima Brandon* written underneath. Why — all the years of her childhood — she had seen this little volume of Dante in her mother's room, and a hot wave of passionate protest rose in her. It was not Cosima's book at all; it was Mummie's; or, if not Mummie's, then the book belonged to her married life and Daddy had had no right to give it to Cosima. Cosima had left it in leaving everything — and would she not be justified in slipping it aside and

keeping it? But — no, no, no, her wiser heart whispered; all that other life was spoiled. It had been spoiled already when he could give this book away. And now Cosima's life, too, was dead. She had known that it was dead that morning when he had said to her, Cosima's adversary: 'Spare me.' 'It's all over for her, too. — That's what happens,' she thought, laying the book in its corner and folding the delicate garments over it. And she knew that she was sorry for Cosima.

'Well, now I'll go and see Mr. Wyntringham. — I do hope she's not really ill,' she said, rising. 'Did she seem ill to you, Pratt, when you were with her this morning?'

'A little tired perhaps, Miss, but then she never sleeps well; she was enjoying the day and she noticed the blackbird singing. — She asked me if it was the blackbird. — She takes things very hard, Miss,' said Pratt in a low voice. 'She's not had an easy life.'

'I don't think that life is easy for anybody — do you, Pratt?' Philippa murmured, and turning away she saw that Monty had stepped into his basket and was sitting with his eyes fixed meditatively upon her. 'Monty, Monty, Monty,' she murmured, looking at him, 'I wish you weren't going. We're very

fond of each other, aren't we, darling?' She knelt down and kissed his head. 'Very, very difficult for everyone, don't you think?'

'Yes, Miss, I do that,' said Pratt, and Philippa knew that she and Pratt were both near tears.

She stood at the top of the stairs mastering herself, and then ran down rapidly and opened the study door. There sat Daddy, still writing. 'Daddy,' she said, closing the door and going slowly up to him, 'did you know that Cosima had gone?'

Her father went on writing. 'Gone where?' he asked acidly.

'Back to Rest Harrow. With Mr. Chantry. Haven't you seen her?'

He laid down the pen. 'Yes. I've seen her.'

'Well, did she say anything?'

'What do you mean? Of course she said something. — She'll come back. She's taken her father and will come back.'

Philippa stood beside him looking down at the bureau, setting the inkstand more accurately in its place, laying a paper-cutter in the tray. 'I don't think so. Pratt is packing all her things. She sent a note to Pratt and they went out to the garage so that no one should hear.'

Aldous looked up at his child. 'If she's really gone, I'll not ask her to come back.'

'But, Daddy' — leaning against his desk, looking down at the writing things she still unseeingly moved, Philippa spoke in the lowest voice — 'it wasn't about him — about her father, was it? — Because that really wouldn't be fair. — I mean, of course, it would make her angry to hear that I'd struck him. I oughtn't to have struck him. I ought just to have laughed and paid no attention. — He really didn't do anything at all, poor old thing.'

'No; it wasn't her father. She saw me meet him on the lawn, but we hardly spoke of him, though he may have been the occasion.' Aldous got up and went to the window. 'If she's really gone, I shan't ask her to come back,' he repeated.

'Did she say anything about going, Daddy?'

'She did.'

'And you didn't believe her?'

'I don't know what I believed. I thought she was making a scene, as usual.'

'And what did you say, Daddy?' They were near, as they had been near that morning, and she could question him like an equal, knowing both their lives at stake.

He answered, looking out at the ring court: 'I said "go."'

In the long silence that followed, it was no elation that came to Philippa, not even relief for the loosing of a burden. Rather, a deep sense of anxiety fell upon her, a searching — as if for something misplaced — lost — forgotten. What was amiss? He was hers now, as never in their lives before; he depended on her utterly; and she felt herself looking with that anxiety from side to side as if to find some help against the pressure of this new responsibility. 'Poor old Daddy — he *has* made a mess of things!' was the first thought that came clearly; and then: 'It was all because of me.'

She stood there silent, and he turned at last with his unfocussed gaze. She did not know whether he were looking at her or far beyond her as he said: 'So now we have each other, Philippa.'

'Oh, Daddy — was it because of me?' Deep anxiety broke from her. 'Did she come like that — because of me?'

'Of course she did. How else? It's always been because of you.'

'But, Daddy — weren't you unkind, to tell her to go when she must have been so miserable? She was happy when she woke up. Pratt told me that she

was happy. Pratt said she asked about the blackbird.'

'Happy? Not she! Unless she was pleased at having made me wretched! As for kindness, I've never failed in kindness to her. It's she who's pursued me, from the beginning, with her insensate jealousy.'

Philippa stood and thought. 'But, Daddy — you said yourself this morning that I'd be the same in her place. — Don't you remember saying that? It was true. I mean, I'm jealous, too. I've always been horribly jealous of you and her — and hated her — until I felt you loved me best again.'

A hard flush at this mounted to her father's cheek; she might have struck it, the colour that came was so violent and so vivid. 'You're like her in nothing! I was doing what I could for her this morning; I was standing by her, and you knew that I was standing by her — though she'd made me sick with her craft and her malice. — Don't say you're like her!'

'I'm crafty, too, Daddy — and she knows it!'

'Don't talk nonsense!' he cried, while she persisted: 'But it's so. I'm not like her in a great many ways, but when it comes to craft and jealousy, we understand each other. — The only difference is that I'd have gone away long ago.'

'What are you doing? Why are you trying to defend her? Do you want her back again? — Now that we're free at last!'

She understood his icy anger and how near the hot tears lay under it, yet even as her heart yearned towards him, that inner press of searching and anxiety made her pause. Did she, perhaps, want Cosima back? Might it be better if she could come back again, after a little while? — After she and Daddy had had a lovely time together — for of course it was up to her now, since he'd sacrificed everything for her — struck everything out of his life because of her — it was up to her to make poor Daddy frightfully happy. 'And I will: I will,' Philippa promised herself, her bright eyes fixed on his flushed, incensed, unhappy face. 'Only if he could have borne with Cosima, pitied her, kept her quiet, it might have been better, since he and I were really together all the time. — No, I see,' she said slowly and to herself rather than to her father, 'she simply couldn't stand it. I don't want her back, because it wouldn't work, but I don't believe it ever could have worked, once I'd come. — Oh, Daddy' — even yet she did not go to him or put her arms round him; something still held her back; it was as if someone had died and until the funeral

were over one could not kiss and be happy. — 'All I mean is that we must be sorry for her; because you simply *have* to be horrid if you're not the one loved best, and she did love you better than anything.'

CHAPTER XIX

'MUMMIE,' said Billy, 'I suppose boys in the time of Chaucer, when they'd been very ill and were getting better, lay just like this, with their hand in their mother's hand and had, perhaps, flowers to look at. — There must have been lots of wild daffodils in the woods, don't you think, and their mothers would have picked them and put them in a jar near the bed; — they wouldn't have had glasses, I suppose.'

'Yes; just like this. The woods must have been full of all sorts of lovely flowers in those days and English people have always been fond of flowers. I suppose if they were very rich great people, in castles, attendants took care of the children; but even then mothers must have sat by their sons sometimes. You'd have looked just the same; little boys have never changed much with their short hair; — only I'd have had on a stiff bodice and a high headdress — isn't it queer to think of? — And I don't suppose,' said Beth, reflecting, 'that even if I'd lived in a castle I'd have had a hot bath in the morning.'

'You'd have been awfully clean, all the same, Mummie; I'm sure of that; perhaps a harder, colder kind of cleanness, and your hand a little chapped, but smelling like a nut' — Billy lifted it to sniff at it — 'or a violet; — and you'd have looked beautiful in one of the tall headdresses, with your braids at each side. You *do* look rather like a Chaucer lady already — like Emilie, you know; — only we shouldn't have lived in a castle; I see people in castles always looking down on a sort of sea of tree-tops; — almost frightening; Philippa would have lived in a castle; but we'd have been in a quiet little manor down among the trees — almost hidden — at the end of long glades — and a few fields about us and daffodils everywhere. — Did they have 'flu then, I wonder?'

'Something very like it, anyway; and the children usually died when they were really ill, I'm afraid. — They hadn't much idea of how to take care of them. I remember a letter, much later, too, from a father, in which he writes of the death of his little girl and of his young turkeys in the same sentence; — but of course they must have loved their children; most of them.'

'Mothers must have loved them. I expect most fathers didn't mind much; but mothers must always

have loved them. — And he would lie just like this, and feel his feet so warm and cosy, far away, down under the bedclothes, and his ribs breathing quietly up and down, and perhaps his nose tickling a little — so that he scratched it' — Billy scratched his nose — 'and he'd look at daffodils. Even if the room was quite different and the mother dressed quite differently, everything would *feel* just the same, so that all I have to do to be a boy in Chaucer's time is to shut my eyes,' said Billy, shutting his, 'and feel things.'

Billy had been very ill indeed; so ill that on one day Beth had wondered whether she ought to write and tell Philippa down at River House, so that she and Aldous might come. The strain of indecision had racked her, for though it must be a father's right to come, his presence might be dangerous to Billy. Billy's sense of alienation from Aldous had deepened during the years, and she knew, with a helpless sinking of the heart, that he saw in him now only the traitor who had abandoned and struck her down. She had not written, and Billy had turned his corner, and she was thankful that she had exposed him to no such ordeal.

'Mummie,' he said suddenly, after lying silent for a little while, 'didn't you like Chal very much?'

Chal's appearance among them had been a surprising episode in Philippa's unexpected visit. Billy had fallen ill on the day she went to River House, and since then Beth had had hardly time to think of that bright glancing week; but now, as Billy spoke, the gaze of the young American came back to her, from across the intervening chasm, and Billy's voice relighted her own happy memories. 'I liked him very much,' she said.

'If all Americans had been like that, and if all English people had been like us,' said Billy, always ready with an historical comparison, 'I don't suppose there'd ever have been a War of Independence and we'd all have been together ever since, English people in America, and English people in England; it's a pity, don't you think; only perhaps it's more interesting to have the world divided up and different. And he *is* different, isn't he? Only one doesn't quite see how; except that he seems gentler and to care more about everything; English people only care about the things they know already, perhaps. Is he coming back soon, do you think?'

'Not very soon, I gather. Not for a year, perhaps. And then he has to go back to his own country.'

'But that doesn't make much difference to Americans, does it? He talked about coming to England just the way Grannie talks about going over to Paris. He cared very much about you, Mummie. He was thinking about you a great deal. I suppose Philippa will marry him some day, won't she?'

'Marry him!' Beth turned an astonished gaze on her son. She knew that Billy meditated deeply on his sister and that, in spite of the deep wound inflicted on his tenderness by her departure from their lives, she still charmed as much as she perplexed him; but something now in his confident voice made her wonder if the fraternal heart, because of its dispassionateness, might see further than the maternal. Surmises and memories crowded upon her. 'But she hardly knows him, Billy,' she found.

'Don't people often fall in love when they hardly know each other? — She does like him, Mummie; most awfully; you saw that, didn't you?'

'It would be very sad,' said Beth, after a moment, 'if she married an American and went away to America. Even if they came to England as easily as we go to France, it would be sad. Let's

hope that he'll stay a friend and that they won't fall in love.'

'People *can* stay friends and still be in love, can't they? Isn't that the best of all? — I mean if one *has* to fall in love; — and everybody doesn't have to, do they?'

'Well, most people hope to,' said Beth, considering, and careful of the plastic young mind.

'I don't hope to,' said Billy. 'If staying friends is the best part, it's a pity to muddle it by falling in love at all, I think. I shall go on staying friends with the people I care for and go on living with you. That's the good of being a boy, isn't it? It's more natural for a boy to stay with a mother than for a girl.'

'I don't see that, darling. It's not supposed to be so.'

'It seems to me more natural. Someone like Chal comes and makes love to the girl and takes her away; but no one makes love to a boy, so he needn't go unless he wants to.'

'Not unless *he* wants to make love to someone!' Beth laughed, but a startled laugh; and Billy, turning on his side and closing his eyes, said: 'Well, I shall always love you best — so *that* won't happen! We'll go on and on together, you and I, caring

more and more and having lovelier times, until we die.'

She sat, his hand in hers when he had fallen asleep, and looked at him. The little face was surprisingly lovely as it lay turned to her, for one so seldom saw Billy's face without the spectacles. The gentle lines of his lips echoed the grave lines of his brows and his eyelashes lay peacefully on shadows hollowed by illness. It had the look that sleeping or dead faces sometimes show; attentive to mystery, and as she looked so earnestly upon it, thinking of his last words, happiness welled up in her, from the clasp of her child's fingers, from the heart of the mystery he looked upon, so that for the first time since Aldous had left her she could contemplate her life without regret or pain. It was here, with Billy; a dedicated life; grown up imperceptibly on the wreck of the old; and as if with the slow, sweet pulsations from his heart passing into hers, she felt herself lifted up into that pure circle where all memories flowed to light.

Her mother, too, was talking of Chal when she came to dinner. She had heard from a friend in Paris and brought the letter to show to Beth. Edith Burdett was meeting Chal's mother and sister; they were the best type of American; charming

people. 'And you'll see, Beth,' said Mrs. Oliffe, her smile still capable of a leap into fierceness, 'that Mrs. Day knows all about Cosima Brandon and thinks you've been outrageously treated. She met the lady, it seems, years and years ago, when she had first detached herself from poor Colonel Brandon and was seeking whom she might devour in her early youth.'

Beth was able to parry these thrusts. 'And I have a letter for you, Mother. — Evelyn Merton has asked Billy there for a fortnight of the summer holidays. He and Peter have made great friends and are going to watch birds together.' She had enjoyed with her mildest malice her mother's slight bewilderment at realising that Billy was popular at school.

When her mother was gone and Beth went up to Billy's room again, she took the letters brought by the post to read by his bedside. One was from Philippa and she saw it with the little flutter that Philippa's letters never failed to bring; she had attained to tranquillity before her mother, but before Philippa she never would. It was an unusually thick letter, but that was natural, for, with Cosima's coming and River House full of Easter guests, the child had not written for a week and

there were arrears to make up, and softly opening the envelope, for Billy seemed asleep, she unfolded the sheets and read: 'Darling Mummie,' and then stopped short and felt her breath drop and her cheeks flush, for the next words were: 'Cosima has left Daddy.'

She glanced at Billy. He was not asleep. His eyes had opened and he said, looking over at her: 'Is it from Philippa?'

'Yes, darling: a nice long letter.'

'Will you tell me if she says anything about bulfinches?'

'Bulfinches?'

'Don't you remember she said in her last letter that if they came to the plum-tree again she'd let me know? If I lived in the country I'd plant plum-trees on purpose for the bulfinches to come for the buds. I'd rather see one bulfinch — wouldn't you, Mummie — than eat all the plums in the world.'

'I would, indeed. But go to sleep, now, darling, and I'll give you all the news in the morning.'

Billy closed his eyes obediently and Beth rallied her forces and read on: 'Cosima has left Daddy, and I'm afraid it's really because of me. I won't try to tell you all about it, for what there is to tell wouldn't explain a bit and she did try to play up,

from the beginning, I'm sure; but it's been too much for her, and perhaps, from the beginning, I really enjoyed seeing her hang herself. I *am* horrible, you know, Mummie; but then she never had any right to be with us, had she, and all I ever *did* was to stand still and smile; — only now that she *is* hanged, I can't help being sorry for her. She and Mr. Chantry came on Monday and on Tuesday they left, and I'd been as nice to them as possible; but it all went on behind the scenes with poor unfortunate Daddy and I saw that she'd done for herself, really, when I had a walk with him on Tuesday morning before breakfast. Mummie — I told him at last what I told you so long ago — do you remember? — and you promised never to tell. What you said then was the truth; she went to him because he'd been harsh to her about me being lost — (Oh, Mummie I told him everything!) — and she didn't stay. And when he heard that you'd always known and that I'd made you promise, it upset him dreadfully. I haven't written till now because we wanted to be sure and until Daddy heard from her we couldn't be; but the letter came from Mr. Chantry this morning — very dignified and very stiff — he has a right to that, hasn't he! — to say that she'd returned to him and could never

be happy with Daddy again, and that since they'd been married in Switzerland she would divorce him for desertion as soon as possible — It's rather hard on Daddy being divorced twice in four years' time! — but it was a good letter, not a bit spiteful, and we were to keep the servants for as long as we needed them and not think of returning any of the furniture that belonged to her. Of course, we are returning all her furniture, and it was rather embarrassing about the servants, but I wired to everybody and put them off and told the servants they must go back to London at once. Ronnie Carteret didn't hear in time and has been with us with only old Mrs. Mickleham to take care of us all; but we've managed perfectly and Ronnie has been a miracle of tact. My heart still feels a little stretched as though we'd come through space in a rocket and didn't yet quite know on which planet we'd landed. Nothing is ever quite the same as one would have imagined it, is it, Mummie; because to have a father as part of your family is one thing and to have him all to yourself with no one else there at all is another; but of course we're going to have a lovely time and to start by another walking trip. What we've planned is to let River House again, unfurnished, and take a little flat in London — we

both like Chelsea. And I'll go on at school and of course I do hope, Mummie darling — and so I know does Daddy, though he wouldn't feel a right to say so — that you'll let me bring him with me to see you before very long: because now that Cosima is gone we are really all back where we were before she came, aren't we? Your loving PHILIPPA.'

Billy was not asleep. He was looking at her again, quietly, yet with an intentness that reminded her of far-away days when, as a little boy, he had wondered what was happening to them all: and, before any thought, it was a sudden panic of defensive anger that rose in her. — What right had they, when she and Billy had built up the new life, to come and frighten her? She was afraid, she knew not of what, but it was as if in her heart a great bell had been struck heavily and swung slowly from side to side, making her tremble.

'Is Philippa all right, Mummie?' said Billy.

'Perfectly all right, darling.'

'You were so still that I had to open my eyes,' said Billy. 'I somehow thought that she'd got the 'flu.'

'No; she's all right. They are having a lovely time.' It was Billy's house of life; nothing must threaten it; least of all her own treachery; yet it was

Aldous's face she was seeing, looking round at her on a night four years ago. A little rug was cast round his shoulders and he was miserable and she had not understood him. How strange; she had not remembered the rug till then. How cold he must have been sitting there in the fireless room.

'And the bulfinches, Mummie?' said Billy timidly. Her face had betrayed something. He was troubled, and his timid persistency brought another memory; little modelled heads on a tray; a Viking; an Anglo-Saxon.

'She didn't say anything about the bulfinches, Billy. She's alone with your father now. His wife has left him. — That's what I'm thinking about, darling. It's rather startled me.'

'Left him, Mummie?'

'Yes. — You see I don't think that she was ever very happy about Philippa. Your father cared most for Philippa, I think, and that led to the difficulty.'

'Won't she ever come back?'

'I don't think so.'

'And will he come here to live now, Mummie?' Billy asked.

She had not to stop to think or compute. A sleeping little boy with his hand in his mother's answered everything; put everything in its place,

however heavily that great bell might still go on swinging in her heart.

'No, dear; he's never coming back here to live,' she said. 'Perhaps some day to tea, when Philippa marries, if he's lonely; we could give him tea now and then, couldn't we, Billy, if he wanted to come. — But he's never coming here to live again.'

PART IV

CHAPTER I

IT WAS strange, so strange as to be uncanny, Beth felt, that she should again see Cosima Brandon, who had left her life, at a Queen's Hall concert where she had first entered it, and it was comforting to know that her mother, listening to the great orchestra beside her, would not be aware that she sat there, far below, near the front row of the stalls, the person whose impression upon their destiny had been at once so terribly significant and so slight. It was not until towards the end of the concert, absorbed as she had been by the rendering of the Brahms and Beethoven symphonies, that the distant black-and-silver figure had caught her eyes, and as she raised her glasses there slid into their circle a summer variant of just such a lovely little hat as had elicited Philippa's comparison five years ago; Beth seemed to hear her saying: 'Mummie, why don't *you* dress like that?' as she watched Cosima Brandon — while leaning to listen to her friend — draw out her mirror and lipstick and sadly, automatically, redden her lips. Over a year

had passed since she had left Aldous. She was Cosima Brandon again, and: 'Poor thing,' Beth found herself thinking, the decorative gesture having so little of heart or hope in it, 'I wonder if she's very unhappy.' And then, laying down the glasses, she thought: 'I mustn't look at her. For nothing in the world must Mother guess she's here.' And, deeper than any fear of her own discomfort, was a protective instinct towards the dispossessed and dejected rival.

But she was not to escape an unexpected ordeal. The concert was crowded and the occupants of the stalls were pressing out into the vestibule below as they reached it, and almost at the same moment that Mrs. Oliffe caught a friend's eye and stood aside from the stream to greet her, Beth heard herself accosted by a well-remembered voice: 'We *can* speak to each other, can't we?' She felt the fragrance of Cosima Brandon's proximity before she saw her, before she saw the dark eyes close beside her, Cosima pressing from behind, not touching her, yet so near that no touch was necessary, so near that all the veils of pitiful female artifice were apparent to Beth's timid glance — the rouge laid a little unevenly on the pallid lips, the powder losing its whiteness in the ochre tones of the throat where

lay the glimmer of well-remembered pearls. 'I saw you coming and waited,' Cosima murmured, moving on slowly just a step behind her, and though it was still the voice that wove a circle and held one helpless, Beth, for all her tremor and uncertainty, felt it dispossessed of all its malign magic; it was a little hoarsened in its half-whispered urgency and, though so languorously assured, a little hurried. 'When I saw you I felt I had something I must say,' she murmured. 'And that you would understand. — You've got the kindest face in the world. — You'd wait at the scaffold's foot — however frightened you were — and receive the head as it dropped. — Well; that's all. I'm the head.'

'Oh. — Don't. — Please don't,' Beth felt herself pleading as she gazed into the great dark eyes. And, seeing that Cosima appreciated her own tragic simile, she found a maternal firmness. 'You mustn't talk like that,' she said.

'But it *is* like that,' Cosima insisted. 'They've cut off my head. — Just as they cut off yours. Now I know what you felt when he left you.'

Beth saw that her mother had turned from her friend and was moving towards them. She also saw that it was Mrs. Cranley, who, at a little distance, studied a poster and feigned unconsciousness,

and as she murmured: 'But he hasn't left you. — You left him' — for that reminder might bring comfort, she was remembering, with a strange interweaving, bared canine teeth, Proust, a magnolia branch, and the bitter-sweet smile of lips that seemed to be saying: 'foo-foo.' Even now in their bitterness they were sweet as Cosima answered: 'I didn't go. They put me out. He and Philippa put me out.'

'My mother's just behind us,' Beth whispered. 'I'm afraid we can't talk. — I mean, she wouldn't understand. — Only I'm so sorry ——'

'I wasn't sorry for you,' Cosima turned her head to glance over her shoulder indifferently towards Mrs. Oliffe. — 'She's beautiful, your mother. She looks like Philippa — cruel like Philippa. She'd cut heads off, too. — I didn't think about you at all that day you came — except to be a little jealous of you, because I wasn't even then quite sure of him. Well, good-bye. — The moral is — I felt that I owed it to you — it doesn't pay to take husbands from their wives; not if they have daughters like Philippa. — Is he happy with her?'

'Very happy, I think. You know, I've lost them both.'

'I know. No one could keep anything — near

Philippa — perhaps *he'll* lose her. — It's his turn now to lose, isn't it? — I try to hate him, you see, so that I shan't go on adoring him so dreadfully. — You're the best off of us all, perhaps. Good-bye; perhaps I'll come to see you, veiled and cloaked — quite surreptitiously, to give no offence,' Cosima whispered, the bitter-sweet smile of self-appreciation still curling at a corner of her mouth. — 'You'd let me come and sit down in your shade, wouldn't you?' And she was gone.

'My dear — who was that?' They were in the doorway and Mrs. Oliffe spoke with a sharp utterance.

Beth did not answer her at once. She felt singularly remote, singularly assured. They had walked down Regent Street, crossed Oxford Circus and paused to wait for their 'bus before she said: 'Cosima Brandon.' Perhaps it was Cosima's imperturbability that so emboldened her.

'Cosima Brandon!'

'Yes, Mother. Now you've seen her.'

They mounted their 'bus and Mrs. Oliffe sat silent for some time. 'I saw no beauty in her,' she remarked at last, and Beth observed that her hands, clasped tightly on her bag, showed their nervous trembling. 'She has a huge mouth and goggling eyes.'

'I think she's rather beautiful. — Darling Mother — I'm so sorry. — Don't let it upset you.'

'It doesn't upset me — now that she's upset.'

'That's what she wanted to tell me. She was pitiful.'

'Was she? There's effrontery even in her pitifulness. Did I actually hear her saying that she wanted to come and see you?'

'I shouldn't mind; — but she never will.'

'I should hope not! That would be *le comble!*' said Mrs. Oliffe, getting out her lavender-scented handkerchief and blowing first at one fine dry nostril and then at the other. '*Le comble!*' she repeated. 'Though you'd be willing, I know, to make of yourself a tree for the jackdaws, jays and magpies, and all the other marauders, to perch in! Don't let her find shelter, I beg!'

'Mother, you'd have been sorry for her, really. She said that she'd had her head cut off. She's suffered dreadfully. She *is* suffering.'

'Good! I'm glad to hear that her head has fallen, though I'm afraid that she'll soon lift it in search of fresh adventure. *Fausse; fausse*, to the bone. I said it long ago, never having seen her, and I say it again now that I have. No, my dear — I'll

talk no more of her, since it must distress you. My only comment on the whole history, and it's often struck me, is that people who make a failure of a first marriage seldom make a success of a second. The people who make a success of marriage are the people who realise that it's a calling, like any other, requiring character. — And now we'll talk of Philippa. — She's coming to tea, you say, and I'd like you to bring me up to date before we meet. I see her so seldom nowadays.'

'I know, Mother dear. I've never imagined such a busy young creature. Games, studies, dances, and housekeeping, and she's good at everything. I can see from what she tells me that she runs their little flat beautifully and makes Aldous perfectly happy. How she manages on their tiny income I can't think. They even ride in Richmond Park; they were riding this morning.' And while Beth talked, glad to escape from the burning subject, while she told of Philippa's prowess, her mind, taking refuge in a secret shrine more and more securely inhabited, dwelt in gratitude on that glimpse of Aldous that Cosima, with strangely discerning generosity, had put before her; for even on that day of cruel memories Aldous had not been untrue to her, since Cosima, still, had not been

sure of him. Dear Aldous, dear, unfortunate, unchanged. She might never see him again, but he seemed once more to be her own.

Philippa was at the drawing-room window looking out as they entered the gate under the June foliage. Her small black head was bent forward, and with the little peak on her forehead she made Beth think, as she stood there, still, blithe, watchful, of a swallow poised and only waiting to fly. — 'Yes: — she'll soon fly,' thought Beth. Why the thought came to-day she did not know, but the simile of the swallow brought it, and something in the light intentness of Philippa's gaze. It was as if she were waiting to say something. And Beth's heart knew the old flutter, half-pain, half-joy, the flutter that her own Billy never brought.

'You are late, my children,' said Philippa, turning from the window to greet them, and as she had seen something new in her face so now Beth's nice ear discerned a new note in the ease and accuracy of Philippa's voice. 'I'll make your tea; you must both rest. — Was it very splendid? We went to the play last night. — Not a very good play; woolly here and there. They try so hard not to be sentimental and then give a bleat! — Grannie, what a divine hat!' Philippa was always very gay and

light with her grandmother who, as she well knew, had never forgiven her.

'Do you call it a hat, my dear? I hoped it was an old lady's bonnet,' said Mrs. Oliffe. 'I am the only old lady left in London who wears a bonnet and covers up her legs.'

'It's the craftiest bonnet ever seen, then — just as your skirts are crafty. There's nothing lovelier than black tulle and pearls or than black silk ankles. — Yes,' Philippa chattered as she made the tea, 'we dined and went to the play with Ronnie and his mother. — I'm going to stay with them in July, Mummie. Daddy likes them all so much.'

'And when are you going to announce your engagement, my dear? You are engaged, I must infer, to the young man with whom you spend every spare moment.' Mrs. Oliffe looked with a perplexed eye upon this friendship, not understanding how it could persist, now that Cosima, its initiator, had departed.

'Grannie, don't pretend to be Victorian, when you're not one bit. — If I ever do announce it, it won't be for ten years. — We're not in the very least in love with each other,' Philippa declared, pouring out the tea; 'and I don't believe we ever shall be. We know each other too well.'

'That seems to be the trouble with all of you young moderns,' said Mrs. Oliffe, while Beth, watching her child, was more and more aware of preoccupation veiled by prattle. 'Will Mother go soon?' she wondered, for, despite the armed neutrality between them, she knew that in her heart her mother doted upon Philippa nearly as much as she did and relished her conquests far more. Indeed, it was nearly seven when Mrs. Oliffe rose and said: 'Come with me as far as my 'bus, Philippa.'

Philippa in going out cast an odd glance upon her mother. As plainly as if words were spoken it said: 'I'll manage it. I must see you,' and indeed Beth had hardly washed her face and tidied her hair for Sunday night supper before a ring at the bell announced Philippa's return.

'Mummie,' she said, tossing her hat aside, as they met in the drawing-room, 'I'm going to stay to supper, of course. I do want a time with you. — No one's coming?'

'No one, dear. I have a very heavy morning to-morrow and lots of work to get through to-night, so I didn't ask Grannie on purpose.'

'I'll go in time. — However much work you had, you'd have to see *me*.' Philippa passed her arm round her mother and gently pulled her down beside

her on the sofa, while Beth, laughing, said: 'I'm aware of that, my dear.'

Philippa was examining her face. 'You're nourished and rested, aren't you? You've washed your face and powdered your nose and are ready for anything. Well — it's not such a great deal, Mummie — so don't tremble! Just this. I want you to have Daddy and me to tea to-morrow.'

'To-morrow? Darling — this is sudden.' So sudden that her breath was taken.

'The more sudden the better: surely, Mummie. You know, I did ask you over a year ago — when I wrote about Cosima from River House. And you never answered.'

'He wasn't divorced then,' said Beth, after a moment.

'Well, he *is* now. Does that mean "yes"?'

'And you never asked again,' Beth went on after a moment, and knew that her heart was thumping. '*He* has never wanted to come.'

'It wasn't for him to ask, Mummie; and' — said Philippa, taking thought — 'it wasn't really for me to ask again, was it?'

'Well; I rather think so. I think it was for you.'

'Well, *I* was waiting for the divorce, too,' said

Philippa, and her mother felt that she was arranging her thoughts. 'And this half-term holiday is just the moment. — Billy away and all. — It's so lucky that Billy's half-term isn't till next week.'

'Yes. That is lucky. — I'd rather he came, for the first time, when Billy wasn't here. — But has he said anything, Philippa?'

'No; he's said nothing special. He did say, long ago, after Cosima went, that of course you'd never care to see him again. And I said that I wasn't at all sure of that, and there we let it rest. But what made me specially think of it, Mummie,' said Philippa, and she fixed her eyes on her mother, 'is that I had a letter from Chal last night and that he wants to come to-morrow, too.'

Beth was aware then of a strange shock: it did not seem to come so much from Philippa's quiet words as from Philippa herself. It was as if Philippa had been, since she saw her at the window, charged with some electric potency and that it passed between them now. At once her mother was aware of a need for care — and caution. 'I see,' she said, slowly, but trying to make it seem not slowly. 'But why not have them meet at the flat? Why have your father come for the first time when Chal's here?'

'I've rather thought it out, Mummie' — Philippa

kept her arm within her mother's and her eyes on hers — 'and in the first place Chal asks to come here; he wants to see you; he doesn't know Daddy at all; and he may only be in London for the day; he may only be passing through on his way back to America. And in the second place, won't it really be easier for you — for you and Daddy — to have him there? You'll have Chal to think about, I mean. It will lift things.'

'Yes. I see that,' Beth reflected, and her heart was beating more quietly now, Philippa rather than herself in her mind. 'Only — how will your father like it? Have you told him?'

'I've not had time, really; I mean, I've waited till I could ask you. — You were the one to ask; surely you see that, Mummie,' said Philippa, with a touch of impatience. 'And I think he *would* like it. I think, that's to say, he'd much rather be here, since Chal is coming. I wouldn't like to have Chal without him. It would seem like keeping Daddy out; like hiding something.'

With all her care she had given herself away. Her mother knew that at once, while Philippa fixed her eyes on the Chinese picture over the mantelpiece; so given herself away — the poor little darling — that it was natural, easy, inevitable, to ask in the

most consecutive voice: 'Philippa darling — are you thinking of marrying Chal?'

Philippa did not move her eyes from the picture or lift her hands from their clasp around her mother's arm, and after a pause she said, as calmly and as consecutively as Beth: 'Yes. I'm thinking of it. — Only I don't know whether he is.'

'What do you mean by that, my darling? Has he said — written — nothing?'

'Absolutely nothing. — He's written — a few letters, since he went; but he's said nothing. It's surprised me a good deal. It's made me feel very wild. — Mummie — it's been an awfully queer sort of year for me altogether.'

'My darling. — Oh, my poor little darling. — Yes; I see; it explains everything.'

'Everything? What, Mummie? What do you mean?'

'Only that I felt you changed; not underneath, I know; but as if you wore a suit of chain armour under your dresses; something shone, glinted; — something defensive. — Darling — it's splendid, the way you've carried on; keeping ahead in everything; making your father so happy!'

'You do understand, Mummie. Yes; you do. — Not that I've thought of it all the time, of course;

I wouldn't let myself; but it's been a sort of breathlessness. And when I felt very breathless, it's almost made me hate him. — I *had* to hate him because I adored him so!'

With what strange echoes the house of life reverberated. Holding her child, Beth seemed to see the same figure walking rapidly through its chambers, the same hand pressed to the same burning heart. She understood; of course she understood. 'It's only a shield, isn't it, darling?' she murmured, and Philippa answered, leaning now her head against her mother's shoulder: 'Only a shield. — Of course,' she said presently, 'when I can think instead of feeling, I know what's happened. He thought of me as a child. I saw that on the last day we were together when I was already in love with him. I'm afraid he even suspected — a little — that I *was* in love, only he thought of me as such a child that for my own sake as much as his own he wouldn't take it seriously; and he's left me perfectly free, like this — to grow up, and to change. Well, I have grown up, and I haven't changed, and when I found his letter last night — it was lying there, Mummie, when we came in from the play — I knew that the time had come. If he's not in love with me now, it's all over; and if he is, I'll

marry him. Rather shaming, isn't it? Only I don't feel ashamed. I feel rather splendid; ready for tragedy — if tragedy it must be,' said Philippa, slightly smiling, and the sound of her voice, the sight of her smile, made Beth think of the swallow launching itself upon a hazardous migration.

'Darling,' she said, and never had she been so near Philippa. It was as if for the first time in her life the currents of their being flowed together, 'I think he must be in love with you. — If he's coming back.'

'I think so, too,' said Philippa. 'I think, though he felt me a child and didn't understand what had happened eighteen months ago, that I counted for him as much as he did for me. I think, really and truly, that it was love at first sight, Mummie. And deep under everything, I think it's he who's most in love, because there's more of him to love with.'

They were near; it almost frightened Beth to feel how near, lest Philippa, feeling it from her, should start and draw away, growing shy. All her striving and yearning to possess her child had been in vain; — sweet, cruel, capricious, transient, Philippa had always flitted just out of reach and she had had no charm with which to secure her. And now, when she had given her up, when she felt her only part in

her to be her love for her, she came, she leaned, she opened the depths of her heart to her — in perfect trust. It was as if the swallow had fallen lightly there against her shoulder.

'There's a great deal of you, darling,' she said. 'You've not found out yet how much.'

'No; that's true,' said Philippa; 'but there's a great deal that it might not be very pleasant to find out — for him or for me. — Never mind! We must risk it. — Mummie' — she raised herself and looked into her mother's face — 'how wonderful you are! It's easier to tell you about it than to think about it to myself. If he sails away and leaves me, I'll come and cry on your shoulder, and no one but you in the whole wide world will ever know. Daddy will never, never know, Mummie; we'll keep it from him all our lives. But, if it *does* happen, shall I break it to him, or will you?'

'Oh, my child! — How can you ask? You. — Of course, you!'

'I don't know' — Philippa was gazing intently at her. 'It might be easier for him — from you. He'll take it frightfully hard, you know.'

'Your poor father.' Beth tried to think how Aldous would take it. 'Philippa, if it happens, will it mean that you will live in America?'

'Yes, Mummie.' Philippa held her mother's hand and looked steadily at her. 'That's the trouble. We should come to and fro a great deal, I suppose, as Americans do; but our life would be over there. He *is* an American, you see, and I want him to be one. I want to live his life if I marry him.'

'Your poor father,' Beth repeated. She looked away, still trying to imagine what life would hold for Aldous without Philippa, and, something coming to her, she went on: 'Do you know who I saw to-day, at the Queen's Hall? So strange it was. — In the same place as five years ago. — Yes; Cosima Brandon.'

'Cosima?' Philippa kept her eyes on her. 'Did you, Mummie?' She paused. 'How I wish I'd never gone to live with them!' she then said.

'Oh, Philippa! Do you really feel that? That it was really only because of you?'

'Only because of me. I don't mean they suited, really; but I'm afraid they would have got on — if I hadn't come. I think she'd have been quite different if I hadn't been there. Living with him would have made her different. And she *wanted* to be different — she liked his way really better than her way. — Poor Cosima! — If only I could have known,' Philippa murmured.

'She spoke to me,' said Beth, after a little silence. 'She made me very sorry for her. She loves him still.'

'Of course she does.'

'Darling,' Beth looked down at the hand she held. 'How do you feel as to that possibility? — I mean — if you married Chal and left him. Don't you think they might come together again?'

'Never, Mummie,' said Philippa. She slowly shook her head, looking at her mother. 'Never; never.'

'Why not?

'Would you really want it?' Philippa scrutinised her face. 'Yes. I see you would. But they'll never come together again. You see; he never thinks of her.'

'How do you mean? How do you know?'

'I know perfectly well. He couldn't be so happy if he remembered her. I remember her far more than he does, and I'm sorrier. — Isn't it strange, Mummie? Men are like that, I think; they won't remember anything that hurts them — or impedes them. — All men except Chal! *He* would remember — however much it hurt. Is it because women have the children, do you think, and learn to remember, with their very flesh, for nine whole

months before they come? I often muse over men and women, you know, thinking of Daddy and Cosima, and Daddy and you. — Only, with you, Mummie' — Philippa stopped, and again with intentness scrutinised her mother's face — 'with you it's different. I don't know that he remembers you exactly; but you are *with* him; you're part of his life; — while she's quite cut away. Mummie' — Philippa, after the old child habit, turned her head and leaned her forehead against her mother's shoulder — 'if I marry Chal — won't you take him back?'

For a moment, as she heard these words, Beth had no thought. No thought came with which to withstand them; only a sudden vision, and slight enough it seemed! — A glass full of daffodils. No. She had not to struggle against a pity deeper far than any personal longing: the struggle had been passed through long ago, by Billy's bedside. 'Never, darling,' she said, 'even if he wanted it.'

'But, Mummie,' said Philippa, still with her hidden face, 'isn't that a little cruel? *You* can't be cruel. You're not that sort of person.'

'It's not from cruelty, darling. It's only because I live in another world now.'

'But, Mummie, he wouldn't really change that.

I think I know what you mean; — but he wouldn't want it — in any way that meant pressure. He would only want it in every way that gave you the advantage. — I mean; — he has nothing to give, and you have.'

'A wife doesn't want to have the advantage, Philippa. She wants her husband to have it.'

'I know.' Philippa sat upright, her hand still tightly clasped in her mother's hand. 'When they love them as you do Daddy; — but if you love him enough, you can have pity on him, can't you, just because he has no advantage? You're the sort of person who can. He'd come for a home, Mummie, and you'd take him on — as if he were another committee.'

'Oh, my child!' Through her sudden tears Beth gave a helpless laugh. 'Never. I love him too much for that.'

CHAPTER II

ALDOUS woke on the Monday morning with a sense of deep contentment. His room at the back of the little flat looked out from its third-floor height at the tops of a row of poplar-trees that grew in the long strip of garden below, and the cool pale sky behind them, crossed by white streaks of delicately crinkled cloud, was like the background of an early-Italian picture; and thinking of Italian pictures made him think of the wandering that he and Philippa were to start on in September when her school days would be over and his book done. There was no reason why they should not stay away till spring. River House was safely let and they could let the flat. — France, Italy, Greece, they would see them all together, and he placed Philippa in her blue dress against the Parthenon, Saint Mark's, and Chartres, foreseeing the delicious interchange of impression that would bubble up from these splendid experiences. Never were two minds more happily matched than theirs — his fortifying, hers stimulating. The sense of confident unity covered great and little things, and he remembered the play on

Saturday when her eye had turned on him with its beam of lambent mirth, sharing, with him, its detection of the craftily concealed sentimentality. Her help with the book was unerring; it was as if she took up his nervously, fretfully shuffled hand of cards, rich in possibilities, but redundant, ill-assorted — and swiftly discarded, rearranged, pointing out the leads, the combinations; and he seemed to hear her say: '*This* is your strong suit, Daddy, play from this.' The book would be good; very good. They could go over the proofs during the winter; in Sicily, perhaps; and he saw Philippa picking up shells on the Sicilian beaches.

After all, he thought, watching the white clouds soften and disperse as the morning light flooded the sky, everything had been, in a sense, for the best. He was aware of the cruel human instinct that discounted others' pain when it had flowered in happiness for self, yet he could not disown his own contentment. What could one do but form from the ambiguities of life a pattern suited to one's perception? He had suffered, too, and this had been the happiest year of his life; he seemed to gather it up, sheaved and garnered, as he lay and looked out at the poplars.

Philippa was waiting for him in the little dining-

room that, at the front, was noisy with the sound of traffic below, but sunny, gay, freakish here and there with unexpected lines and colours, yet composed and decorous, too, almost austere, the dining-room of a modern girl who went her own way, yet cared more to talk to her father than to any dancing youth. It had been to him rather than to Ronnie that her eye had turned on Saturday. Ronnie often annoyed her; his confident assurance clashing with a certain glibness against her finer taste. There was not, as yet, a thread of sentiment between them, though he, of all her comrades, was the favourite. Aldous was thinking of this with satisfaction as he went forward to kiss his child and say: 'We ought to be at River House to-day. You look like the river.'

Philippa had on his favourite white-and-blue and was looking singularly young, almost like the small girl of so few years ago. Her eyelids were a little heavy, as if from sleep, and the drift of freckles showed across her nose and cheeks. She was not at her prettiest, and he loved her best when she was not at her prettiest: he felt her then most securely his.

'But I'm glad we're in London; London is delicious in June — all buzzing with excitement,' said

Philippa, picking up her letters, while Aldous, going to the sideboard to cut himself a slice of ham, said: 'You call it buzzing! Listen to that racket! The country has a different buzz.'

'It doesn't buzz; it dozes,' said Philippa, her eyes on her notes. — 'Don't pretend you're not a Cockney, too, Daddy.'

'It's the Cockney who longs most for escape. — Ham for you, too, Phil? — We must doze at River House all next summer. — Seriously, wouldn't you like the idea of settling in the country for good?'

'Not at all!' Philippa smiled. 'Not till I'm middle-aged; one may be ready for bed then! I love the noise and rushing about. I love big modern cities — and the bigger the better. — What are your plans for to-day, Daddy? — Yes, ham for me, please.'

'What are yours, rather? It's your day.'

'Well, for this afternoon, I've had a plan ever since Saturday. I've said nothing about it till I heard definitely from Mummie, because it's a wonderful plan and I wanted it sure; but I had a talk with her yesterday, Daddy, and it's all right,' said Philippa. 'She'd have been too shy and uncertain, of course — and so would you, my darling: — but it's absurd, as I told her, that you shouldn't

meet, and I'm taking you there to tea. I'm to ring her up this morning and say it's all right for you. — But of course it *is* all right, isn't it, Daddy?'

The narrow flush had mounted to his face; his eyes took on what Philippa called their March Hare look. 'This very afternoon?'

'Yes.' Philippa was making the coffee in a glass globe on the table. 'Do you mind?'

'Isn't it rather sudden?'

'The suddener the better, surely, Daddy? We'll none of us have the time for feeling too much.'

'How did you bring her to it? — She's never consented before.'

'She's never really refused, Daddy; it was really a question of the *bien séances*, wasn't it; until you were free, you know.'

'You've thought it all out.' He had remained standing by the sideboard with their plates in his hands, and as he now returned to the table, his eyes rested on her with a certain conjecture. 'Very cleverly,' he said.

'I've thought it all out *very* cleverly,' Philippa echoed. The coffee had bubbled up three times and she poured it out and frothed the milk into his cup and passed it to him. 'And it was to-day I fixed on because I heard from Chal on Saturday, and he's to

be here to-day, and wanted to see Mummie and me again before going back to America. Mummie thought it such a good plan, Daddy. She's very pleased about it. — It'll give us all three something else to talk about, you see, except our own odd situation.'

Smooth. That was the word that shot into her father's mind — before any thought could come — as he heard her. A dark surge of feeling lay beneath it, but he fixed his mind on that word. She was too smooth. And her blue eyes resting so steadily upon his from across the table could not conceal their intentness.

'Chal,' he said. He meant to say it calmly, without emphasis or query, but it came with a strange vehemence surprising himself; and suddenly he saw Chal, vividly, a pale, apparitional figure etched by the bitter acid of memory against a vast, remote background (tombs of the Plantagenets — America) and fixing calm eyes on a black-and-white butterfly of a woman, even then puzzled, even then antagonised by their lack of tribute. He had felt none of this, seen none of it, consciously, five years ago at Fontevrault; why should it return to him now with a hidden and overwhelming significance? — bringing a belated resentment against the conceited

boy who had remained offensively unaffected by such charm; — bringing a belated sympathy for Cosima — poor little Cosima — smiling upon him from the transparent shadow of her hat. — 'I don't know much about European butterflies,' he had said. — Good God! — Why had he emerged from his own dark unknown continent to cast this consternation upon them all! No wonder Cosima had hated him and forbidden him the house. — Only, if you forbade Chal the house, he walked with your daughter in the Park. — Thus astonishingly, devastatingly, did thoughts, memories, associations, link, strive, and jostle in his mind.

'I don't quite understand,' he said slowly. His eyes had remained all this while fixed on Philippa. 'Why should Chal be there?'

'Why — he needn't be, of course, if you'd rather not,' she said. Her voice spanned the interval with perfect felicity, but had she, too, not been aware of chasms? 'I mean, of course you could come on another day to Mummie's. — Only since he *is* to be there, I thought, this time, you'd like to see him, too; because, last time, you remember, Daddy, it was just a little grief to you; — until I explained. I don't want anything of that to happen again,' she said. — Were those blue eyes loving or were they

crafty? — 'I thought you might feel, perhaps, left out.'

Trapped. This was now the word. — Was it possible that such words could pass through his mind in regard to Philippa? — but who had said that she could wind him round her little finger? She wound him now; she secured him; she had him in a trap. 'I thought it was a plan for my meeting your mother,' he said, again after a slight silence; 'I didn't realise, when you first spoke, that it was merely a plan for my meeting Chal.' And, as he spoke, he knew the folly of so indicating the chasm she strove to overpass, or ignore.

'But, Daddy,' she said at once, very sweetly but very firmly, 'if you mean to meet Chal at all, it would have to be at Mummie's; and to-day may be the only chance. It's Mummie he knows; it's Mummie he wants to see, as much as me. — He's very fond of her. She's very fond of him; and he's my special friend. But if you'd rather not be there — don't let's think of it any longer.'

He had fallen back in his chair, his coffee untasted, and he pushed his plate away and turned his chair sideways and rested his arm along the table, looking across at his child, helplessly, quite helplessly now, for he saw that those words he had

caught at were words of terror and that she had every rightness on her side. Philippa was impeccable; loyal to her friendship; loyal to him. Only he hated Chal, and Cosima had said that Philippa was in love with him. 'It's very kind of you to think it all out for me, I'm sure,' he said. 'And of course I'd rather meet any special friend of yours. — To-day may be the only chance, you say. Is he going back to America to-morrow?'

'I really don't know, Daddy,' said Philippa, glancing at his plate and cup. 'He didn't say. — He only said. — Wait. — Here is his letter.' — She got up and went to her little bureau and found the folded sheet and came and gave it to him. It was written from a Paris hotel.

'Dear Philippa, — Here I am again. I arrive in London on Sunday evening. Do send me a line to say if you and your mother can give me tea at five on Monday. Yours ever,

'Chal'

Aldous read, his blood curdling with hatred of the writer. 'He knows your address?' he said, looking at Chal's delicate hand.

'Yes. We've written several times.' Philippa took the note and went back to her place, and in her

voice her father felt a blade of coldness. Thus far and no further, it seemed to warn him.

'And your mother? Has she heard?'

'I don't think so.'

'So she's very fond on the strength of a tea-party a year ago?'

'Yes. Only on that. Very fond. — One is of Chal,' said Philippa.

He was not hating Philippa — not hating his darling: but he hated Chal, and his thought, in its helplessness, turned on Beth — Beth the trusted, the confided in, sitting there behind her curtain of silence. How could Beth not rejoice to see him humbled? How not enjoy her closeness to Philippa's heart? 'It's all rather portentous,' he muttered, and Philippa's eyes were growing colder and colder as they watched him, and coldly, indeed, she repeated his word: 'Portentous?'

'My meeting with your mother so complicated; — the great and the small event so lumped together.'

'Don't let us lump them together.'

'I don't think we will.' He rose. 'I think, that is to say, I'll see her first. — She can receive me, I suppose, at four instead of five — and we can be alone?'

'Of course she can. I'll telephone and tell her.' Philippa, too, got up. She looked over at him. His face was turned from her. He did not see her face as it studied him, its youth steadied to a strangely mature control; but suddenly she came to him and put her arm around his neck. 'May I make you some fresh coffee?'

With the shock of his surprise and gratitude the tears sprang to Aldous's eyes. 'My darling!'

'Are we quarrelling, Daddy — you and I?'

'My darling — I love you better than anything in the world.'

'But you are angry with me, Daddy; really angry: — all for nothing. Daddy — forgive me just whispering it — but you *have* always been a little silly about Chal — haven't you!' she whispered it, laughing softly, marvellously mistress of herself, and of him. — Oh — how completely mistress of him; it came over him, a deep sick flow of fear as he held her, his cheek pressed to hers; — and why was she so merciful, so tender, she from whom the touch of steel always, till now, struck fire? How was she enabled to be so understanding of his folly? She pitied him; she was afraid for him, seeing his fear for himself.

But she whispered on, lovely, cajoling, rational:

'You know I've indulged you dreadfully. — I've let you be, always, an old-fashioned father. — Only you mustn't forget, Daddy, that more than anything, really, we're modern; — we're comrades.'

All his heart was melted towards her, not healed — oh, far from healed — but melted, helpless; while under all the dark question thudded: 'Is she in love with him?' But he could ask nothing, fixing his hope now on Beth, Beth whom he was to see that afternoon, who knew all, understood all, and would help him as she had always helped. When he saw Beth, she would tell him just how far he had been a fool. It was Beth who was to be trusted; not Cosima. 'Give me some fresh coffee, comrade,' he said.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING out over the hawthorn-tree as the clock struck four, Beth saw him coming up the street. He was tall and slight in grey, a touch of the old blue that she had chosen as his colour in his breast-pocket, a touch at his collar; his head was bent and his hands clasped behind him on his stick. So he approached their home — as so often during eighteen years; and for a moment her heart stood still, seeing him again, for she could feel it only that: their home; as if Cosima Brandon had never happened. And was he coming for the hour together because he feared Chal? — It was when a husband was unhappy that he came to his wife. Or was it because he wanted the hour alone with her? — He would not want that unless he loved her. What had Philippa said? — 'You are *with* him. — You are still a part of his life.'

She went back to her sofa and stood beside it waiting, and in a moment she heard him on the stair, the maid, discreet but wide-eyed, announced, 'Mr. Wyntringham,' and Aldous was before her.

How often in the past year she had rehearsed that

possibility; seeing Aldous come into the room and seeing after that only a blank — filled, perhaps, by his broken words, by silence, or by tears; — and then, in the helplessness of her imagination, finding herself in his arms. She knew that it could never be so; yet this was the background to all her thoughts of their meeting. And now, as she looked at his drawn, thin, anxious face, she knew that he was indeed very unhappy and that he was not thinking of her at all. He was not thinking of her; no stress or strain awaited her, except the strain of recognising that, while she saw him in relation to all her life, past and present, he saw her only in relation to Philippa.

'It's very kind of you, Beth,' he murmured; — they had touched hands and he was a little ill at ease, the colour on his cheek. 'It's very kind of you to see me again. I'm very grateful.'

Now she was on the sofa and he in the easy-chair, his favourite easy-chair; the one where he had used always to sit; where he had sat on that last night with the little rug round his shoulders. Chuffie, grown old and portly, rose from the hearth-rug and came forward to sniff, delicately, at his trouser-leg, then stood, head turned aside, tail waving, as though communing with distant memories; Aldous

stooped down and stroked his back, yet she knew that he was not thinking of Chuffie, and suddenly, irrelevantly, with a wave of shame, she realised that she had done her hair carefully and put on her prettiest dress. She had always gone on doing her hair like this because he had loved it in her girlhood; and she had always had a dress of thin pearl-grey in summer because it was the colour he liked best to see her in. And it was revealed to her now that a woman once but no longer loved is invisible. Aldous would not have noticed if she had worn purple or twisted her braids on the top of her head, though, as he repeated, 'Very grateful to you, my dear Beth,' his eyes, as kind as they were troubled, travelled about the room, and he said looking at the empty wall, 'You've taken down the children's picture.'

She was so unprepared for this that it took her a moment to assemble her thoughts, still held in that flurry of shame, and she murmured, twisting her hands together in her lap: 'Yes. — Philippa had it moved into my room — over a year ago.'

'Oh.' He looked disconcerted. 'That's rather a pity, isn't it?'

'I'm used to it there now,' she answered, and felt found out in fault, yet could not but remember that

it was he as well as Philippa who had always objected to the picture in the drawing-room.

'Billy is getting on famously, isn't he?' said Aldous, when a few silent moments had passed. 'Philippa tells me all about him, of course, and his history. Very interesting his caring for history so much. He inherits that from your father, doesn't he?'

'I think he does. He's so like Father in so many ways.'

'Curious, isn't it, these things of inheritance; how they come out; now here, now there,' said Aldous.

Chuffie had turned his head and was looking at him fixedly, his tail still waving, and now, giving him up, as it were, went back to the hearth-rug, drew his front paws under his breast and settled again to slumber, and again for some moments there was silence.

'Beth,' Aldous said suddenly, and involuntarily she drew herself upright, 'I'm afraid I'm foolish; you'll find me very foolish, I think — but I must tell you at once that I've come like this, before the time — because of Philippa.' And as she said nothing, only looking over at him with her wide eyes, he added: 'I'm very much distressed; — about this young American.'

She gazed at him, not knowing what to say. To reassure him, sharing Philippa's hopes, would be duplicity; to assent and sympathise, would be to betray Philippa's secret. She could only murmur, faintly and vaguely, pressing her hands tightly together — 'Oh: — I'm so sorry.'

'You're not distressed, I take it,' said Aldous — and how well she knew the glance he cast at her — the frosty glance.

'Distressed? I don't know, Aldous. I mean — what is there to be distressed about? — I like him so very much.'

'Do you mean by that,' said her husband, eyeing her, 'that you'd like Philippa to marry him?'

No; people never changed; the thought went through her mind while, the colour mantling in her face, she tried to think. He had been cruel to her about Philippa on that last night; horribly cruel and unfair. But though he must have recognised and repented of that cruelty, he now repeated it. 'Is it a question of that?' she murmured — and it was right that she should be punished, she told herself; for in her humiliation it now seemed to her that there must have been treachery to Billy in her heart if she had done her hair so carefully.

'Is it?' said Aldous, his cold eyes on her. 'That's

what I've come to ask you — because it seems you know so much more than I do. You like him very much to start with. While I dislike him; very much.'

'Oh — but, Aldous — how can you? Why? He seemed to me — so good.'

'Good!' Aldous took out his dagger with the word. It was, perhaps, not directed against her; but all he asked was to plunge it into Chal's heart.

'You know what I mean: — it's a silly word, of course — when he's so clever — so unusual. — But I felt happy with him; at once; we all did. He makes one feel happy.'

'Does he? Please don't include me in your encomium. — Is he in love with Philippa? That's what I want to know.'

And now, before that tone, the unhappy colour still dyeing her face, her hands all whitened from the grasp she put upon them, it came to Beth suddenly that she was not wrong; not wrong at all; that only Aldous was wrong. He was wrong because he was so frightened; so unhappy. She understood: she was terribly sorry for him, but she found herself unshackled. Fear fell from her. Her only fear was for him, lest he must be hurt too

much. 'I haven't an idea,' she said, and blessed her stars that it was the unvarnished truth.

He sat sunken in his chair, looking almost old, and, taking possession of every jot and tittle of comfort her ignorance could offer, he said, going carefully: 'Perhaps no harm's done, then. I mean — he can go off again and none of us be the worse for it. She's certainly very fond of him. She can't hide that; she doesn't try to hide it; — but I don't believe her heart is touched. She has a hard heart — thank God! — Because it would be impossible for us to contemplate such a marriage, wouldn't it?' It was statement rather than enquiry, but he stopped after making it and looked at her.

'That wouldn't be the question, would it, Aldous?' she said, and she, too, so ill-equipped for strategy, went carefully. — 'I mean — it would be for them, not for us, to decide.'

'My dear Beth! — Are you so hoodwinked by modern myths! These things *are* still decided by the parents — when they have their wits about them and their children are under age. It's an impossible marriage. He is an American. He'll live, I presume, in America — easily as they all seem to expatriate themselves; — Philippa would go to America with him; leave her country and us.

What we have to do now is to forestall such a calamity.'

'What can we do, if they do love each other?' Beth sat, her eyes turned away.

'Love!' He picked up the word as if it had been a flung gauntlet. 'Love! All this talk about love! Self-suggestion! Self-deception! Illusion! What else is it!'

Her eyes at that came back to him in their astonishment. He sat there in that chair and said it to her.

'You know what I mean, Beth.' He flushed a little, perhaps remembering, too. 'Who knows better than you — who've seen me through my follies? — If they're in love — they're where we were, twenty-five years ago; in twenty-five years they might perfectly well be where we are now — love they never so fondly!'

'I don't think so,' said Beth. 'Philippa's not the kind of person to lose things.'

'She's the sort of person to break them, though!' Her father gave a harsh laugh. 'Does that take them any further? — She's worth twenty of him already — in brain and charm and character: — one only has to look at him to see it. At thirty, she'll be a woman, and at fifty, he'll still be a pretty

boy. No; they wouldn't be where we are, in twenty-five years' time; — she'd have chucked him long before!'

'I don't think so.' As she listened, a strong sense of resistance was rising up in Beth. 'I don't feel him her inferior, in any way. I feel him as more strong; with more character. I think she feels it, too; I think it's just what she does feel about him. — Oh, Aldous — all I mean is that we must do nothing against it: — even if we could.'

'Nothing against it? Do you mean to say that if some priest got hold of our child and was wheedling her into a Carmelite convent we could do nothing against it — at her age! She's only nineteen. If she wants to marry, let her marry young Carteret. I'd not have a word to say against it.'

'But, Aldous — what could we do? — What would there be to do — if you were right about it? and I don't think that you are.'

'Do! I can oppose it, and you can stand beside me. — When he comes now, we can show him that we are immovably opposed to it.'

'It never succeeds, Aldous. Such opposition never succeeds — you must know that. It would only harden Philippa against you.'

'*You're* against me, I see.' He rose to his feet.

'Very well. I'll act alone. She's only nineteen. She's my child. I'll carry her off for two years. I'll keep her from him for as long as I have a legal right to do so. There's time for anything to happen in two years. She may forget him. He may die.' A flame of red laid on each thin cheek, Aldous stood leaning with both hands on the back of his chair, staring before him with dagger eyes.

'You don't mean that, Aldous,' said Beth in a low voice.

'I do mean it. Unless he goes back to America to-morrow, I'll carry her off. We were to have started in September; we'll start in June instead.'

'It would make her almost hate you.'

'It might; for the time. She'd thank me later.'

'If he were to die, it would break her heart.'

'Break her heart! What of mine! It's she who's emptied my life of everything else — and she knows it.'

'But, Aldous — mustn't it be so? — I mean — mustn't it be so with parents? Our time's over; we've had our time; it's their time now, and Philippa must take her own risks.'

'I'm not so weak-spirited. I take them for her. That's my privilege; my power.'

A silence fell. Beth sat, gazing now, not at him, but before her; seeing the wreckage he might make; and her pity for him did not weaken her. She held her heart steady and spoke as she had never spoken before in her life. 'You forget that Philippa is mine, in law, not yours,' she said.

She felt that Aldous turned his eyes on her, though she did not look at him.

'What do you mean by that?' he asked, after a pregnant moment had passed.

'It's only madness, I know; because you are so afraid. I'm so sorry. I understand so perfectly. But I couldn't let you take her away against her will. If you really tried to force her heart, I'd take her from you. She'd come back to me.'

He looked at her for a moment longer, while she did not meet his eyes, and she felt that he was hating her. Then he looked down at his hands, clasping the chair-top. 'I see,' he said. 'This is my punishment.'

'No, Aldous; no.'

'Deferred,' he went on with fierce icy utterance, 'but increased by compound interest.'

'I have done nothing to be spoken to like that,' said Beth. She felt no weakening to tears.

'You take my child from me.'

'I give my child her freedom. — You are wrong, Aldous; cruel and wrong.'

'I think you are. Cruel and wrong. — Well. I see. What am I to expect, then? What are your terms?'

'Only Philippa's happiness. I want her to be happy. Through love. I believe in love, you see. In spite of everything.'

He stood and looked at her for a long moment, but he was not thinking of her; if her last words held an unconscious reminder, an unconscious appeal, he was deaf to it. He was thinking only of Philippa, and, if she would not keep Philippa for him, she had no meaning for him. This was all that it had come to — her marriage: it drifted over Beth as she sat with head bent down — like a cloud of dust. 'All — all crumbled into dust' — she thought; yet her heart was not quite overthrown. Even as she heard him mutter, 'Not till I'm forced to it!' — as she heard him turn and leave her, she knew that an augury of happiness was with her and that she had kept Philippa safe for Chal.

CHAPTER IV

'SHE perfectly understands my carrying you off:—I could see that,' said Chal. He and Philippa had hardly spoken as they walked quickly to the Park, and, now that they were in the deep summer shade under the familiar trees, they looked at each other as they had not looked before. At tea, with Beth, they had looked, but not seen; not really seen; Philippa realised that now, wondering if he found the grown-up Philippa as changed as she found him. For he was changed. How and why she could not have defined; except that he seemed at once much nearer and much more frightening. She was afraid of Chal—yet blissfully afraid. That mingled fear and nearness had a flavour like nothing that had come to her in life before. Frosted without, delicately, deliciously, she seemed to herself to walk beside him veiled in frozen dew; while within, her blood seemed to glow and to run rejoicing. And Chal was afraid of her. He was quite changed.

'We've got so much to tell each other, haven't

we?' He took off his hat and looked away from her, down the green glades, all filled with the loud singing of a thrush.

'Heaps, simply,' said Philippa. She did not take off her hat. She was not a little girl any longer. 'We wrote so little, didn't we?' Perhaps, some day, long, long from now, she would tell Chal how terribly he had hurt her by writing so little. She might even, some day, tell him that she had really expected him to come back in a few months' time, last year, and had tried to prepare the way with Mummie and Daddy; but that deep humiliation should be hidden from him until a new world had risen to enclose them. They walked outside it now, though the thrush's song seemed to come to her ears from its blossoming thickets; and perhaps — the thought just touched her — the loveliest moment of life was when one walked outside one's Paradise and heard its songs from far away.

'Did you find my letters very empty? — Did you expect me to write more?' Chal asked, looking still before him and not at her. 'He does not dare look at me,' thought Philippa. — 'He thinks I'm too beautiful. — And he's white-and-gold and I'm white-and-black and it's a fairy story.' — 'Well, yes,' she assented, very calmly and rationally.

'Perhaps a little empty. But, after all — you were grown up and I was a little girl.'

He glanced round and down at her. 'You weren't nearly so much a little girl as I thought,' he said. — 'I saw that later — but that was what I thought. — That little girls still at school shouldn't be bothered. But of course I expected to write far more; and to come back long before this.' He stopped; for a long moment he stopped while they walked down the glade, and then he said: 'The reason I didn't, is that after I left you that spring; — in Rome; — I fell in love.'

Never, perhaps, in all her young life, had Philippa known such a shock. It went through her, reversing all the bliss, for within she turned to ice, and without she flamed. It was a shock more intimate, more disintegrating, than when her father had left her and gone to the strange woman. Chal in love? With anyone but her? It was impossible. He had from the first been nearer than anyone in the world. How had he dared feel free to take himself away? Her face, with the fierce effort she made to drive the hot blood back again, turned very white. Chal must see it, for he glanced at her again; but mastering her voice she said: 'Oh. Did you?'

'That's why I didn't write,' said Chal. He did

not speak confusedly or appealingly, but quickly, with careful utterance, showing her simply all that he had to show. 'I couldn't tell you about it, and I didn't like to keep it back. All I could do was to go on writing as if you were the little girl, though of course I knew that there was something unnatural about that and that you'd feel it. From almost the very beginning,' said Chal, and now his voice had a tremor, 'I had a haunted feeling of being astray. Once or twice I nearly broke away and came back: just to find out; — what the truth was.'

'Oh. Yes. I see.' She did not see. And was she hating her darling Chal? But how dared he love anyone else?

'It took me almost a year to get over it,' he said. 'I was miserable almost the whole time; — even for the week or two when it seemed as if it might go on for ever.'

'Why didn't it go on for ever?' Philippa's tone as he stopped again was one of chill detachment. He could not pretend to be detached. But she could. She held Chal off and surveyed him.

He was thinking why; distressedly. 'Because I didn't like her.'

'That sounds awfully conceited. Did she like you?'

'Yes. I think she did. I know it sounds too odious — but it's the truth, all the same. I loved her and didn't like her — not even at the beginning; and she liked me, and didn't love me; not really, ever, I think. You see, it started by my being awfully sorry for her and wanting to help her.'

'How help her? Was she an Italian?'

'No; she was an American girl, in Rome there with her mother. She'd just divorced a great friend of mine — dreadfully frivolously, and I tried to see if I could clear things up between them. I was a fool, of course, and got what I deserved. She was beautiful, and that counted for more than I knew. It was like a catastrophe; everything fell away from me when I saw her. — Philippa, can you forgive me?'

'Forgive you? For what? For disliking her? Or for falling in love with her?' She knew that she was being cruel now and rejoiced in her power of hurting him; for how dreadfully he had hurt her. She saw the beautiful girl like Cosima, and hated her as she had hated Cosima.

'For being so astray,' said Chal. (Nothing would ever make Chal hate her.) 'Yes; for disliking anyone I thought I loved, but even more, of course, for loving anyone I really disliked.'

She wanted to hurt him, yet she knew that she did not hate him now, only the beautiful girl who had fallen on him like a catastrophe, and it hurt her to see Chal's clear eyes so darkened by trouble. 'You'll have to do a great deal of forgiving if you're to be my friend again,' he said, and, as she heard his voice and met his look, the thrush's song came back and the icy hardness was melting from her heart.

'What made you dislike her?' she asked. 'What was it in her you didn't love — if she was so beautiful?'

And reflecting, trying for complete truth, Chal said: 'She wasn't straight.'

It frightened her a little to hear him, the different fear; the fear of the little girl. '*I'm* not straight,' she said, for she, too, must try for complete truth with Chal. 'I mean, I tell lies, I think, quite often.' And now, as his eyes rested on her, she saw a well-remembered sweetness returning to them. They took light from her. They rejoiced in her.

'You'd never tell lies without knowing it,' he assured her.

'Does that make them better?'

'Ever so much less dangerous. — And you'd never tell them to me,' said Chal, 'unless it were my fault.'

Now they had turned aside and were wandering at random over the thick summer grass. Tears suddenly came to Philippa's eyes. Something in Chal, or in herself, hurt her suddenly, yet with a sweet hurt. 'That's the difference between us,' she murmured: 'I'd never think it my fault — and you'd always think it yours.'

'Not always,' he said gently. 'But it was this time, wasn't it? — Because, even if you were a little girl, I oughtn't to have gone astray — ought I?' She looked at him, and he took her hand and held it in his. 'I really ought to have known from the very beginning, Philippa,' he said, 'that you were the only one. — I did know it, underneath, all the time. It shone in me all the time, and I sinned against the light.'

The tears had trembled over her eyelids, and she looked away and murmured: 'Do you think *I* am beautiful?'

'*Most* beautiful,' said Chal, and his voice trembled. 'The most beautiful of all. — Do you mean that you've forgiven me and are my friend again? It seems so strange; you hardly know me, do you; we've hardly met, and yet there really seems nothing to say — if you've forgiven me.'

It was true; there really seemed nothing to say.

He held her hand to his lips and drew it within his arm and they walked on down the glades. 'I was dreadfully frightened when I wrote from Paris that I might be too late,' he said.

'But how did you come to know, all by yourself, without seeing me? Did you really begin to know before seeing me again to-day?' she asked.

'Yes. I did. It just grew inside me. It was always there, like a lovely seed, the memory of your face; and it grew and grew. I thought it would take days and weeks — perhaps months or years — to find out what the truth was, for you; but when I saw you, I knew. We belong to each other for ever and ever, don't we?'

'We'll study architecture together. I'll build castles and you'll build cathedrals. — I quite gave up the idea of architecture when you didn't write,' said Philippa. 'And we'll live in New York and New England and brush back the snow from the trailing arbutus.'

'Oh, my darling. — Do you really mean it? For now? Without an ordeal? Without making me wait? Because that's what I've been wondering about, wondering if it could be that you'd come back with me to America almost at once. — In September. I have to be there, you know. And now

that I've found you, I don't feel as if I *could* leave you again.'

'That's what I feel!' said Philippa. 'I feel as if I could walk onto the steamer with you this evening and sail away. — But I suppose we must tell people and buy clothes and get married. — But we will get married at the beginning of September and see each other every day till then. — Oh, dear! — Yes.' She stopped suddenly in her walk. 'There's poor Daddy.'

Chal, stopping with her, looked at her. 'I've been thinking about him.'

'I haven't.'

'I felt, you know, just now, when your mother said he'd had to go, that she was dreadfully troubled, though she was so sweet, and that my coming had made him unhappy.'

'You've always made him unhappy,' said Philippa. She walked on slowly now, holding Chal's arm, her eyes bent down to the grass, and her mind passed over the image of her father in contemplative pity; not passionate; for all passion was merged in the rapture that passed through her like a singing flame of light. She had thought that she knew love in loving so ardently her father; but what was that ardour to this? This was the undreamed-of Para-

dise in which she walked with her lover; and she could not pause for any regret; only for that contemplative pity, as if turning her head at the gates of the new life to look back with a sad wonder at the dim figures of the old life that she was leaving.

This — she felt the tendrils of her awakened nature going out into all sorts of comprehensions — was what poor Mummie had always felt for Daddy; stranger still — it was what he had once felt for Mummie; and for Cosima. And, as the thought came, arrested in her joy, it was as if, in Paradise, she stood still to listen, and heard from under the blossoming thickets the low hiss of the snake. It was not fair that that hiss should sound upon her ears. It was not fair that she, so young, should have learned such doubt; but if the apple of irony had been put to her child lips there was no help in turning away and denying that she had tasted. — For — she had seen it — Paradise could fail. Held by her lover, it was another shock of realisation that came to her. It could fail. It had failed Mummie; it had failed Cosima; and when it failed, one grew still; and withered. Was it through fault? Not in Mummie's case. — Or lack? — Not in Cosima's. And, as she wondered, the fear that came was not for, but of, herself. 'Chal,' she whispered

suddenly, turning to him and leaning her forehead against his shoulder: 'I'm so horrible.'

'Horrible, darling?'

'Yes. You don't know. — I can't explain. — I'm so cruel: so selfish: — to the bone.'

He was silent for a moment: 'Not if you see it, darling; — not to the bone, if you see it.'

'It doesn't make you less horrible to see it.'

'It makes you in less danger,' he said, as he had said before: and though he understood, divinely, and would always understand her deepest needs, it was only now in part, for he went on: 'And it's my fault, if you've been thinking only of me. We'll try to think of him now.'

Her forehead still leaned against his shoulder, and she closed her eyes, bringing her thoughts back in perplexity to the memory Chal set before her. 'Shall we? — How?' She lifted her head, and then stopped suddenly. 'There he is,' she said.

For it was Daddy who — only a little distance from them — sat in their glade — hers and his before ever Chal was thought of — tilting his chair, his back to them, after the wont she knew so well, to lean his head against the great tree-trunk. She knew that tree. Of course it was with Ygdrasil that he would take refuge. It was almost as much a part

of the past life as Daddy himself, with his grey suit and his tossed grey hair. How often she had played round it as a child, while he sat and watched her! And how often they had sat there side by side delighting in each other! 'There he is,' she repeated, and suddenly she felt that she was trembling.

'Wait, darling.' Chal held her arm and fixed his eyes on the grey figure. 'Let's think. — We'd better tell him now, hadn't we? But what can we plan to make it easier? Could he come with us to America?'

'Oh, no. No. I'm sure not. — He wouldn't want that. I don't think, Chal, that I'd want it — not yet, anyway. Would you?'

'Well, darling — it's of you, of him, I'm thinking. — Shall we get married at once — and carry him off with us to a honeymoon on the Continent? You know, as far as money goes, I've mountains of money. We can do anything we like. Mummie and Alison are in Paris and could come for the wedding right away.'

She held his arm tightly, with both hands, gazing at Daddy; and, while discordant impulses clashed in her mind, what conquered was the truth. 'You know how dreadfully I love him. But this is different. This belongs to us. We can't share it.'

'I don't know about that, darling. Perhaps we can.'

'I don't want to share it. It would spoil it to be shared. — No. — I'll have to tell him, Chal, and he'll have to be unhappy. — Unless he can just be happy *for* me: as Mummie will be. — Wait. Wait here — till I call you.'

She dropped his arm and ran; then, a few yards from Ygdrasil, from the unconscious grey figure, she walked slowly, and Chal, who had watched till then, turned away.

She walked very slowly; he did not hear her. She came behind him and put her hand on his shoulder; then, as he turned his startled, haggard face, she bent and laid her cheek on his. 'Daddy darling — Chal's come,' she whispered.

He understood in a moment. He sat there under her hand and looked up at her. 'You can't leave me,' he said.

It was like a child in its ingenuousness, and the tears rose to her eyes in hearing him. But, in silence, she nodded slowly.

'You're not going to marry him — and leave me?' Aldous repeated. And he rose and, seeing the wild sorrow and wild anger of his face, resistance sprang up in her to meet it, and anger, almost anger — lest

he should spoil her Paradise. One could not have things crying out there, underfoot.

'But, Daddy — children have to. — It's always so.'

'Not to America! Not to another country! It's like having you die! It's the end of our life! You are all that I have left!'

'You have Mummie, Daddy.' She felt relentless, yet her voice faltered as she said the words: 'Perhaps Mummie'll take you back.'

'Your mother! Take me back! You say that to me, Philippa!'

'I mean — you can see her often. And you'll see me, quite often, Daddy. Chal's very rich. We can do what we like. You will come to us. We shall come to you.'

He looked at her and saw the relentless new life in her eyes. He saw that there was no hope for him; none; that it was as Beth had said; that old life must make way. He fell down, heavily, as if already old, onto the chair and stretched his hands along its arms and looked before him, his face hardening to lines of bitter woe; and it hurt Philippa horribly to see what he would look like as an old man.

'Daddy' — she said, timidly now, for he was slain — 'do try to be happy for me — because I'm

so frightfully happy. — May I call Chal? — You must love Chal, too. — Oh, Daddy — try not to be *unhappy*. — I'm sure Mummie will be lovely to you.'

THE END